

The  
Show

Must  
Go

On!



An Oumota Canon Divergence Fanzine



PLEASE BE SEATED

THE SHOW IS  
ABOUT TO BEGIN



THE SHOW MUST GO ON

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# The Ultimate Mistake

When Kokichi wakes up, he finds himself encased by four tiny metal walls. He runs his fingers across the material, attempting to decipher his strange prison; there's a small amount of light shining through three thin horizontal holes in the front wall, high above his head. A locker, maybe? It doesn't seem to be locked, so—

Before he can do anything with this information, a loud metallic *bang* comes from his right. Someone mutters under their breath, and he can hear them pacing around the room. He considers opening the door, but frightening the stranger could lead to an altercation. Decisions, decisions...

The light disappears from the thin gaps in the metal as the stranger approaches the locker door and swings it open. He's tall and muscular, with spiked hair that makes him look even taller; he stares down at Kokichi in shock for a moment before Kokichi speaks up.

"Way to interrupt a guy's beauty sleep," he says, faking a yawn.

The stranger's brow creases. "...Huh? Why would you—"

"Joking! Who would wanna sleep in here? Obviously it wasn't by choice." Kokichi steps out of the locker and stretches his arms over his head. The stranger moves out of his way. "You're not my kidnapper, are you?"

"*What?!* No!" He grimaces. "I was just wondering how the hell I got here. But... kidnapping, huh..." He scratches his chin, lost in thought.



"I dunno about you, but I'm suuuper kidnappable." Kokichi surveys the classroom as he speaks, not finding anything of interest. Then, he turns to offer the stranger his hand. "Kokichi Ouma. You wouldn't have heard of me, though. My importance is a secret, nishishi..."

"I'm Kaito Momota." Kaito shakes his hand with an incredulous look on his face. "I mean, no one's ever tried to kidnap me before, but I'm pretty important, too, y'know! I'm gonna change the world someday."

"How vague!"

"Like yours was any less vague?!"

Kokichi giggles as he reaches for the doorknob to exit the room. He opens his mouth to speak, but whatever he was going to say dies in his throat at the sight of an enormous robot in the hallway.

The second Kaito joins him in the hall, the exisal calls out, "Found you!" It begins to approach, its movements slow but threatening.

"*The fuck?*" Kokichi mutters.

"I dunno what that thing is, but we've gotta get out of here," Kaito shouts. He gestures to the left, pointing out a

staircase leading downwards. "That way!"

The two of them dart for the staircase, not bothering to check over their shoulders as they go. The moment they swivel towards the second half-flight, a second exisal comes into view. It's directly in front of them, blocking the forward path, but not so close that they won't be able to duck down the hallway to their left. Kaito swears under his breath, preparing to make a run for it—

"*Wait.*"

He pauses. He can feel Kokichi gripping the fabric of his right sleeve, holding him back on the landing.

"The hell are we waiting for?! That thing's gonna—"

"Just listen." The two of them go quiet, the air filled with the mechanical hum of the strange machines. "The one from before didn't follow us down the stairs, even though they can definitely fit."

"...Huh. You're right, yeah. I wonder why?"

"Maybe it didn't need to. Look—the one downstairs isn't coming any closer, either."

Kaito's brow furrows at the revelation, and his back straightens, no longer tensing to run. "That *is* weird. You think there's a reason they can't use the stairs?"

"I don't think they can't. I think they just don't need to." Kokichi spares him a sidelong glance, then returns his gaze to the exisal in front of them. "It's standing still. If it can't come up the stairs, it could still come closer and block off our exit. But it's not."

"It's leaving the left hallway open," Kaito finishes. "So, you mean..."

"Yeah. It wants us to go in that direction. Probably."

Kaito scratches the back of his head with his free hand, elbow pointing out. He seems unbothered by it, but Kokichi finally releases his grip on the jacket's other sleeve. "Now that you mention it, the other one was kinda herding us towards the stairway, wasn't it? Then, what do we do? Wherever they're leading us, it's probably a trap."

"I want to know what's down the path it's blocking. If we're not supposed to go that way, there has to be a reason." Kokichi tilts his head to the side, his expression oddly blank. "But it's probably going to chase us for real if we go out of bounds, and I don't think we can outrun it all the way down the hall. The next best thing is to duck in one of the rooms right behind it."

Squinting, Kaito looks down at the two doors. "The bathrooms?"

"Yup. The doors are too small for the robot, and we haven't seen them break anything yet, so they probably aren't supposed to." Kokichi shrugs. "Or, I could be wrong. Maybe we'll trap ourselves in there and have nowhere to run when they break the wall and crush us to death!"

"*Hey!* Don't even joke about that." Kaito frowns and





crosses his arms over his chest. “If they can’t get inside, it’ll give us more time to think about our next move. It’s a good plan. There’s just...” He stares at the exisal. If they weren’t at the top of the stairs, it would be towering over them—more than twice Kaito’s height, for sure. Even taller to a guy like Kokichi. The thing has to weigh a ton, too. If it catches them, they really might be toast.

“Scaryyyy,” Kokichi whispers. He says it in a teasing manner, but there’s no way he isn’t scared, too, right? “We can split here if you don’t trust me, y’know. Maybe I am trying to get you killed. You can take the left and I’ll go forward.”

“I told you to stop saying that! No one’s going to die.” Kaito stands up straighter, pressing his fists together with a determined glare in his eyes. “I *do* trust you, and I know we can do this. We’re in this together!”

The air goes silent for another beat, save for the constant humming sound. Kokichi’s eyes are wide—were they always that purple? Then, he spins around to face the stairs again. “Then keep up, will you?”

Without another word of warning, he darts down the stairs. “*Hey—*”

Kaito is quick to follow, his eyes tracking the back of Kokichi’s head instead of the machine. Despite Kokichi’s speed, he’s only a few steps behind as Kokichi ducks underneath it. The exisal whirs to life, its massive mechanical arms raising up. Kokichi reaches out to Kaito with one hand, opening the door to one of the bathrooms with the other. “*Through the legs!*”

Kaito rushes between the exisal’s legs, ducking to avoid hitting his head. He takes Kokichi’s hand without hesitation and the two of them dive into the bathroom together, quickly shutting the door and pressing their backs to it, panting heavily. Kaito wants to shout, wants to sling an arm around Kokichi’s shoulder and ruffle his hair in victory—but without a moment to spare, their attention is shifted towards the stranger in the bathroom with them.

*Am I going crazy, or did she just come out of a moving wall?*

The blue-haired girl looks just as shocked to see them as they are to see her. She backs up instinctively, pressing up against the wall of the bathroom stalls behind her.

“Uh.” Kaito attempts to say something, but his mind is pulling a blank, and his lungs are still gasping for air.

“You shouldn’t...” The girl trails off, clearing her throat. She wildly points an accusing finger at them. “You shouldn’t be here! This is the girl’s bathroom!”

...So it is. Kaito instinctively wants to apologize, but he quickly shakes the impulse off. “That’s not important right now! There are these giant robots chasing us all over the building—you haven’t seen them?”

“Not *all* over,” Kokichi corrects, his eyes narrowed.

“Right, they were herding us down a specific path.”



“Like sheep.”

Kaito sighs. “Like sheep, I guess. So, you haven’t seen any of them? There’s at least two of ‘em. And... one is right outside the door.”

The girl frowns, adjusting her glasses. “...No. Haven’t seen them.”

“Really...?” Kaito crosses his arms over his chest. “They’re all over the place. I wonder when they showed up... how long have you been in the bathroom?”

Her defensive, incredulous stance returns. “You can’t just ask a lady something like that, you know!”

“Er, sorry?” Kaito sheepishly rubs the back of his neck with one arm. “This isn’t the time to be shy, though. Not with the robots still out there.”

“Kaito is soooo insensitive,” Kokichi prods. “Forget the bathroom talk. How long have you been in the building? How did you get here?”

She perks up a bit, eager to latch onto the slight topic change. “I don’t know... I woke up here a little while ago. I don’t know how I got here.”

“She must’ve been kidnapped, too, right?” Kaito asks, looking to Kokichi for confirmation. Kokichi doesn’t respond, doesn’t nod; instead, his expression drops into something unreadable.

“Yes! Yes, that’s just what I was thinking!” The girl clasps her hands together. “I was so scared waking up all alone in a place so strange... I thought I must have been kidnapped, and I ran to the bathroom to hide! But I can’t imagine why anyone would want to take someone as plain as I am...”

Something is... off. Kaito prides himself on his good instincts, and right now there are alarm bells blaring in his head. His stomach feels like a sinking pit.

“Mhm, mhm, I see.” Kokichi nods solemnly. “Waking up all alone. How scary! Not as scary as this guy’s morning breath, though.”

Too focused on his troubled gut feeling, Kaito’s indignant “*Hey-*” is delayed and quickly cut off as Kokichi continues—

“So, when did you find the hidden passage in the wall? Or were you not going to tell us about that?”

The girl goes pale. It feels like the air has been sucked out of the room. “The... hidden passage? I don’t...”

“You saw that too?!” Kaito exclaims. “I thought I was just seeing things! The wall opened up, right?”

“Right.” Kokichi taps his chin. “I was going to ask where it leads, since she discovered it first, but it seems like she doesn’t want to share.”

The girl swallows the lump in her throat, shifting her weight awkwardly from one foot to the other. “You know, it feels a lot like you’re interrogating me.”

Right as Kaito says “We’re not,” Kokichi says “And what if we are?”

And just like that, something shifts. The girl’s eyes lose focus. A small, disappointed frown graces her features. She



doesn't look scared, or anxious, or truly upset; at worst, she seems mildly annoyed. "I need to work on timing. I should've realized just how important a fraction of a second can be."

Kokichi and Kaito glance at each other after witnessing the unnerving display. "Uh...? What do you mean by that?" Kaito asks. He tenses his muscles, as though expecting a physical altercation at any second.

"I guess it's a good thing I'll get a do-over. I'll get it right when the game starts for real."

"Game? What game?" Kaito cautiously takes a step forward, but Kokichi grabs his arm and pulls him back, his eyes wide and blank.

"Don't," he hisses under his breath.

"It's fine," she continues with a shrug. "I needed to reset, anyways. They made a mistake with your memories and talents. Outfits, too. They woke you up too soon."

"Kaito," Kokichi interrupts. He grabs Kaito's hand. "I think we need to run."

Before Kaito can respond, or either of them can make a break for it, they both suddenly start to feel lightheaded. They sway on their feet before crashing into a conjoined heap on the ground, their hands still clasped together.

But... how? She hasn't even touched them.

"This has its uses, too, I suppose." Tsumugi stands over their crumpled bodies unflinchingly. "You could say I learned something here. So, thank you for that. Sweet dreams."

The last thing either of them sees is the terror in each other's eyes.

When Kokichi wakes up, he finds himself encased by four tiny metal walls. He runs his fingers across the material, attempting to decipher his strange prison; there's a small amount of light shining through three thin horizontal holes in the front wall, high above his head. A locker, maybe? It doesn't seem to be locked, so—

He opens the door without hesitation. While he opens it as gently as any other door, the locker next to his *slams* open. A stranger steps out at the same time as he does.

Ah, well. He'll just have to adapt on the fly. Cautious, but not overtly so—a leader shouldn't show weakness.

"I'm Kokichi Ouma, the Ultimate Supreme Leader!" He extends his hand towards the confused stranger. "And you?"





# START ESCAPE

Can they really escape? Ouma doubts it. The big ‘EXIT’ sign next to the tunnel is proof enough. Still, it doesn’t stop everyone from clinging to that hope. Ouma might be a hater, but he won’t rain on their parade if it means leaving this stupid school. What’s the harm in trying?

“Yumeno-san, watch out for those bombs!”

“Nyahaha! A big cage took Shuichi away!”

“Why is the platform moving away from Gonta?”

“Momota-kun, are you okay?!”

“Huh,” Ouma says, watching the chaos unfold before him. “Go figure.”

(If only he knew.)



They come up with a strategy. Akamatsu will take the lead. If she falls, someone will take her place, and so on and so forth till they reach the exit. Boring! Ouma wants a piggyback. Preferably from Gonta. Except Gonta might run them into a wall (or an early grave). Kiiboy? Nah, he might accidentally set off the bombs. Who else?

“Hey, Momota-chan! I’ve got a problem. See, I was born with weak bones. My doctor says that if I run too much, my legs will turn to jelly! So you should totally carry me to the finish line~”

“No way! That’s just another lie!” Momota winces, hand clawing at his temples. He’s been doing that a lot. The way to the tunnel might be dark, but it’s not enough to hide his pain. Did he really think no one would notice?

Ouma vaguely remembers Momota leaping towards a moving platform, only to mistime his jump and accidentally knock his head against the platform’s edge. It had been a harsh blow, but nothing he hadn’t shrugged off. Which makes sense. Despite the obstacles, none of them got injured. Tired, sure, but more from dented morale than actual physical exhaustion.

Momota, however, looks like shit.

“I’m fine. Just getting vertigo or whatever. It’s nothing I’m not used to with my training regime! OW...”

“Yelling will only make it worse, Momota-chan.”

Momota flinches. “Do you hear that?”

Ouma cups a hand against his ear. Iruma’s cackles. Shinguuji’s observations. Amami’s polite remarks. Ah, the sound of youth. “You’ll have to be more specific. Sadly, I was also born with a rare case of jelly ears.”

Momota looks around like a madman.

Ouma picks at his nails. “Don’t you know? It’s normal to hear ringing in your ears.”

“It’s not that! There’s music...”

“Where? I wanna change it to a better soundtrack!”

“Woah, you can hear it too?! GAH...”

“Of course not,” Ouma says. He watches Momota brace himself against the wall, breaths short and sharp. “This is delusional, even for you. You should totally sit this one out.”

“No,” Momota says, dragging a hand across his face as if peeling away the fear. “Monokuma said we can escape if we all work together. I have to do this with everyone. It’s the only way!”

“That so...?” Ouma runs through the risks, the unanswered mysteries. He considers the ache in his chest, strange yet familiar, that yearns for a home he can’t remember. (Is it foolish to hope? To never give up, no matter your doubts? Desperation is a funny thing. It shares the same spark as optimism.) “Okay, Momota-chan. It’ll be our little secret.”



Ouma dies in the first minute. Next thing he knows, he’s waking up in the boiler room with a suffocating pain, like someone’s crushing his chest. It quickly fades.

They got a little farther than last time, but it’s hard to celebrate when the end seems nowhere in sight. It’s enough to make him cry! (Cue the sad piano.)

“The music changed...”

Ouma blinks, his crocodile tears disappearing in an instant. He tunes out Akamatsu’s speech about friendship and magic and whatever in favour of the wannabe astronaut mumbling beside him. “Hm? Is Momota-chan still hearing things?”

“Eh?” (Akamatsu.) “What’s the matter?” (Shirogane.) “You’re kidding.” (Hoshi.) “Interesting...” (Shinguuji, being creepy as usual.)

Oops! He said that out loud. Well, now that everybody knows, they might as well deal with it. “He’s got a major concussion,” Ouma says. “He threatened me not to tell anyone too... It’s okay! The voices in his head told him to do it.”

Kiiboy hums. “An inner voice? Is that true, Momota-kun?”

“As if! But, uh, everyone was pretty weird when I woke up.” Momota scratches the back of his head. “You were all standing there like a bunch of statues. It was dark, too. Then the lights turned on and the music started... What?”

Everyone shares a glance.

“We don’t know what you’re talking about,” Harukawa says.

Tojou approaches him. “Please let me check your head. You may be suffering from serious trauma, including confusion and memory loss. Do you remember who you are?”



“I don’t have amnesia,” Momota grouches, avoiding her hands.

“You didn’t answer the question,” Ouma points out. “Who is Momota-chan? Where is Momota-chan? More importantly, why did he lie?”

“I didn’t—”

“People can get hurt, now.” Ouma smiles. “Maybe even die. If that happens, you can’t escape with everyone. Forcing us to do the tunnel would be torture. Right, Akamatsu-chan?”

Akamatsu falters. Tricky, huh? They actually have a chance to escape the killing game. But the tunnel is still a trap, and her biggest cheerleader will only drag them down. They can’t afford to be desperate. Ouma already made that mistake.

The sound of two fists bumping together steals their attention.

“One more,” Momota declares. “We’ll beat the Death Road of Despair. I know it!”

Death road to what now? Geez. Ouma sighs as everyone, swayed with renewed passion, walks towards a meaningless endeavour.

He sticks close to Momota. Despite the countless obstacles, he doesn’t let him out of his sight. Akamatsu collapsed ages ago. Momota’s the leader now.

(Momota, who freezes at the edge of a precipice. The moving platform beckons him to jump. He looks in your direction, then at Ouma, who races past with a player’s impatience.)

“Alley-oop!” Ouma takes the leap.

He misses.

His legs flail. Then he starts falling.

Something grabs his ankle. With a yank, Ouma’s head slams against the smooth wall of the precipice. Pain shoots up his skull. He catches a glimpse of the raging waters below, and the bodies that disappear under its surface. Strong hands haul him up.

Suddenly, Momota is checking his head.

“Shit…”

Everyone else races past them, a blur of sleeves that swan-dive over the edge. Bombs explode from behind, a maddening percussion. It hurts.

“Let’s turn back,” Momota urges.

Ouma swallows. “How?” They’ve never had to.

What is this? Why did everyone jump to their deaths?

“Let’s talk later,” Momota says. He, too, takes the leap, carrying Ouma into the origami water below.

When Ouma wakes, it’s dark. He’s standing with everyone. They’re all facing Akamatsu. He can’t move.

When the lights turn on, so does the lightbulb in his understanding.

Akamatsu says the same ol’ speech. Ouma keeps his mouth shut, side-eyeing a certain astronaut.

On the way to the tunnel, Momota explains everything. Ouma hates that he understands. It makes their situation *way* more complicated.

“I’m just glad someone believes me,” Momota effuses. “When you of all people accused me of lying, it made me want to prove my innocence!”

Ouma thinks. “Until we figure out what’s going on, let’s make everyone give up on escaping.”

“Tch. Don’t think my morals can take that, man.”

“Screw your morals! We’re talking horrors worse than a mid-life crisis!” Momota flinches. “What,” Ouma says, following his gaze to the wall. His eyes narrow. “What do you see?”

(Momota looks at you. To him, you’re a blurry face in the crowd. A scary ghost.)

“It doesn’t matter,” he lies. “Look, Ouma, which one would you rather do: escape till our hearts give out, or play Monokuma’s bullshit killing game?”

Well, it’s not like they’ll start killing each other willy-nilly. Though Monokuma probably has the means to convince them, if he can reset their memories. So why hasn’t he?

Maybe that’s part of the torture. “I don’t think we have a choice,” Ouma says.

Momota grumbles. Then, “Still got those jelly legs?”

“Bombs incoming! Dodge, dodge~!”





“I’m not that fast and you’re not that light!”

Everyone steadily leaves them behind, spurred on by a mindless need to progress. Damn the risks, the mysteries. They have a show to put on. Death is the best entertainment—not!

From where he clings on Momota’s back, Ouma sees the world in a new light. The way everyone’s voices fade out, replaced by a single motto. The music in his ears; the flatness in his vision. The only thing he can’t make out is whatever Momota sees in the walls.

They clear the first area. The walls shift from blue to gold. Suddenly, Ouma knows he’s the leader—and how to beat the upcoming obstacles. Why, because everyone else died? Is that how this works?

He and Momota camp at the edge of a steep drop. Up ahead, the floor bounces like piano keys.

“Y’know, jelly legs are a real thing. In space, all your fluids go to your head. Once you’re back on Earth, it comes crashing down to your legs.” Momota grins. “It’s called Puffy-head, Bird-legs Syndrome.”

“Wow... What a stupid name!”

“No, it’s not!” Momota scowls. “What gives, Ouma? It’s like you want me to hate you. Shouldn’t we get along?”

Ouma laughs. “Why? We’re not friends. Just strangers stuck in the same boring killing game.”

He doesn’t expect Momota’s disappointment, nor the reply. “Do you think Monokuma was serious about the game?”

“He put a lot of thought into it. We even have a soundtrack.”

“I wish jelly ears were real...”

Ouma stares at the road before them. “He’s giving us false hope. How do we know that the exit is the escape we want?”

“Because it’s real,” Momota says. “That makes it worth the risk.”

They argue about it. Hours pass. They don’t feel tired, or hungry, or ready to leave. Ouma wishes they had more time. Instead, they fall head-first into a field of bombs. They wake up. It’s the same speech. They try again. They fail. Woah! Feels like a whole arc has passed. More time? What does that even mean in this messed up world?



“How many times does this make it?”

“Dunno. A lot? You’d think Monokuma would call it quits.”

They cleared the second area ages ago. The third is heavy with cages that trap their fellow students, who still act like a bunch of NPCs. Somehow, Ouma knows they’re running out of time. “Maybe something else is behind this.”

Momota grumbles. “What even *is* this? Virtual simulation, I get. JAXA has something on a smaller scale. Didn’t you say something about a TV show?”

“A game show.” The lightbulb brightens. “Or a video game. Either way, someone’s watching us. They won’t let us leave.”

Momota looks away. “Maybe they desperately want us to escape.”

Ouma looks at him. He’s not the same person Ouma met. Does he know Momota better? Or is he another stranger? It’s like... meeting an old friend. Or befriending an old enemy.

Later, as a cage takes them away, he catches Momota staring to the side. To a wall that doesn’t exist.

“One more,” Momota declares, voice blurring with the music (with reality). “I believe in you.”



Can they really escape?

“Hold on, Ouma! We’re gonna reach the exit, drag everyone there, and become friends!”

“Uwah, you’re still delusional!” Yet Ouma clings tight to Momota’s back as they race through the last stretch of platforms. The walls close around them with every step. They can do it. They can actually end this killing game.

(If only.)

“Wha—” Ouma topples. It ruins their balance. He and Momota fall from the last moving platform—

—then Momota throws him across the final gap.

Ouma tumbles on solid ground. He scrambles to his feet, chasing after the hand that disappears below the edge—reaching for a jacket that spills galaxies tens of miles below.

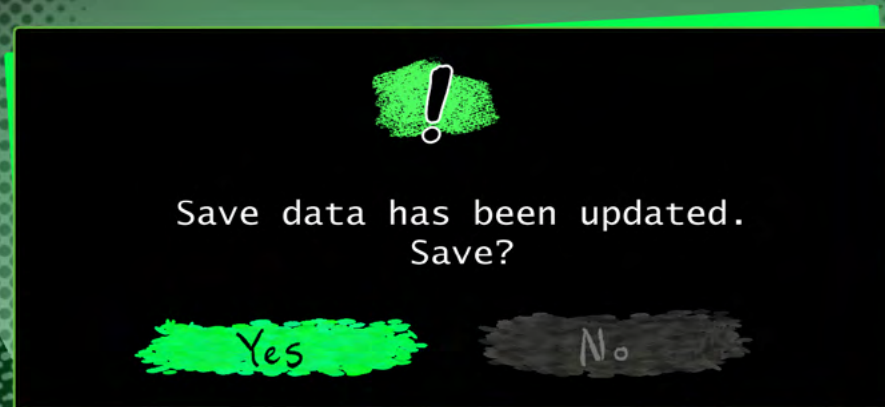
He stares at the crashing, crinkling waves.

He thinks about joining him. About getting to know those strangers.

He wants more time. (You don’t have enough save files.)

The gate yawns. White light floods the chamber. Ouma braces himself as the outside world makes itself known.

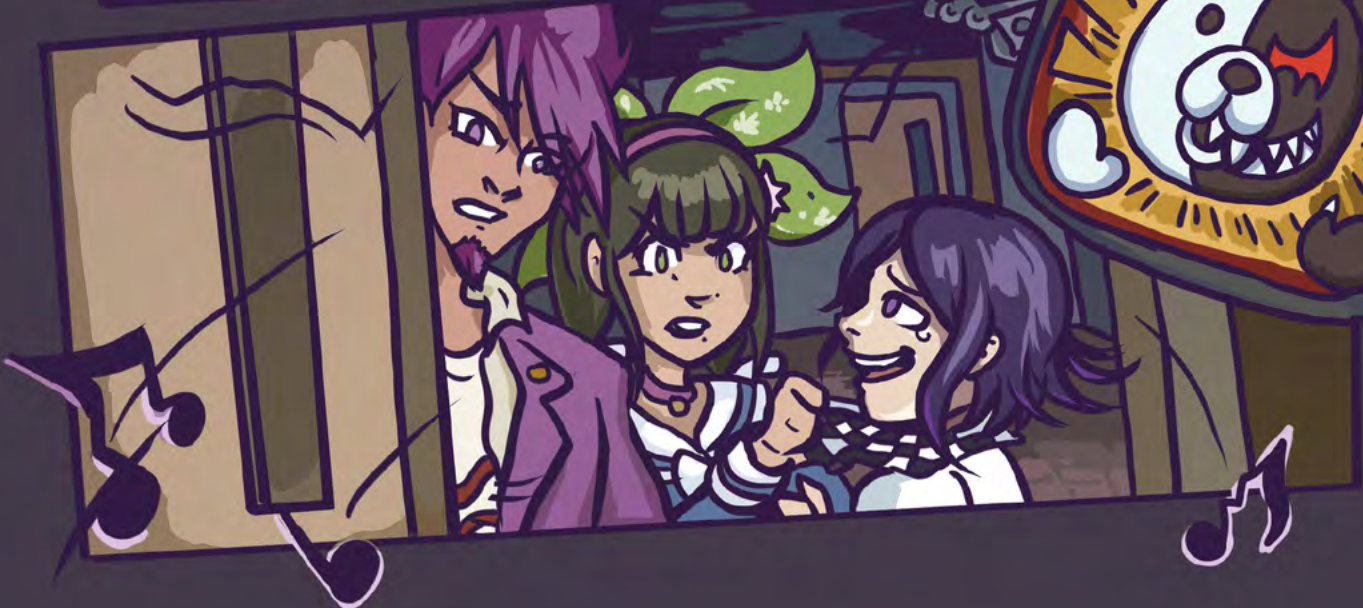




“The show...” The ache in his chest grows. “What are you?”

A comic book page featuring a character with purple hair and a white jacket with a black checkered collar. The character is shown in various panels: walking through a hallway, looking out a window, and lying on the ground. A large, stylized musical staff with notes is overlaid on the page.









# Favors the **Bold**

Ouma stands in the doorway, pale and skinny and smiling, and Momota wonders if he's deteriorated to the point where he's seeing ghosts.

"Momota-chan," Ouma sings, with far too much delight and far too little ghostly *boo*-ing to be the death game's third victim. He raps his knuckles on the open door of Momota's dorm, loudly enough to make Momota's head throb, to make the settling fluid in his lungs slosh around. "Nice place you've got here. Can I come in?"

"How the hell did you open my door?" Momota asks, hoarsely, from his bed. He's too nauseous to point out that every bedroom here is the same. Minus the blood in his.

Ouma smiles and opens his fist, revealing a hairpin. "Magic, Momota-chan," he offers, then closes it: the hairpin slips through his loose fingers, clattering on the ground. Momota opens his mouth to say something, like *get the hell out of my room*, but the incoming cough steals his air. He chokes it back down, and avoids breaking eye contact. Ouma's lips turn further upwards.

"Say," Ouma nudges the heel of his foot against the door, shutting it with a *click*. "Speaking of magic. Shouldn't Momota-chan be investigating a magic show right about now? Your sidekick's waiting for you! And someone might snap him up if you don't hustle."

Momota grits his teeth and sits up. His muscles protest the whole while, *screaming* beneath his skin. Momota's never pinned him as the type to *kill* someone, not in the maybe-three-days they've spent together, but he knows





better than anyone, rotting away in his room, the depths the killing game can drive a person to. He won't go down that easy. Ouma looks at him, disinterested and unamused, like he knows what he's thinking.

"Or," Ouma says. He squats to scoop up the hairpin, examining it. When he rubs his thumb over it, it comes away smeared and wet, vibrantly red enough that Momota can see it from his possibly-deathbed. "Maybe Momota-chan has a reason for not hustling?"

"Are you finished?" Momota asks, when his throat's settled enough to allow for conversation. "Nobody wants to hear your stupid supervillain monologue, man. Go fucking — do whatever the hell you do. You don't give a shit about investigating."

"Supreme leader monologue," Ouma corrects him, looking a little peeved. He flicks the hairpin from his palm, like he's pulling back a miniature bow. It arcs towards Momota's bed, falling towards his lap. Momota clumsily tries to scoop it from the air. "And I'm far from it, Momota-chan."

"Say Momota-chan one more time," Momota says, tensely. His everything hurts, and he's sick and tired of fucking *Ouma*, prancing into his dorm like he owns the place. He wants to sleep more than anything. He also worries he might not wake up. "Fucker."

Ouma rears back, then laughs. "Momota-chan's threatening me! Call the cops! Call the presses! Call your friendly killing game detective!"

He pauses, then looks at Momota, utterly expressionless. He lifts his hand and checks his nails halfheartedly. "Oooorr, I *would* do those things, if... Momota-chan wasn't *dying*. Makes for a pretty unfair game."

Momota's chest tightens, his limited space for air shrinking further. *He* knows it - and he knows *Ouma* knows it - but hearing it said out loud is different, more real. Nauseatingly poignant, utterly *suffocating*, hanging in the air like sickly poison gas.

"What?"

"Lost for words, Momota-chan?" Ouma asks. "That's fine! I don't think you really have time to argue with me, if you know what I mean.." his hand drops to his side, and his head tilts, like some kind of inquisitive household rodent. "Gotta save that strength for a heroic death, right?"

"What the hell are you talking about?" Momota rasps. Ouma's right about one thing: he doesn't have time to play cat to his mouse, or mouse to his cat. "Spit it out, man."

Ouma rolls his eyes, in that condescending way that makes Momota want to wipe his face clean of features. "You're dying." He states, once more. His voice is lower when he's being serious - Momota hadn't noticed that before. But right now, he gets the sense that a different Ouma is standing in front of him than the one he sort-of-knows. "I've got photos of those bloody trails you leave - ew, nasty, by the way! - and you look like a walking corpse. Saihara-chan's just got his face too buried in the case file to notice."

Momota opens his mouth, and Ouma holds up a finger.

"Not done, Momota-chan, remember? Shake out your one brain cell and keep your mouth shut for a second!"



Momota swallows, and sinks back into his pillow. Even if he could speak, he doesn't have a response mustered up - what the hell is there to say? Shuichi eats up his lies, but Ouma won't. And when the number of breaths he has left are countable, he can't waste them.

"It would be real bad if Saihara-chan found out about this! Poor sweet Saihara-chan is so fragile. He would just..." Ouma presses his finger and thumb together, smearing blood between the creases of his knuckles. "Be crushed!"

"So that's what this is?" Momota asks. Ouma smiles at him, looking semi-pleased, like he was waiting for Momota to get the picture. "You're just here to rub it in my face? That you're gonna tell him?"

"Oh, no, Momota-chan!" Ouma drums his pointer and middle fingers against his palm, then withdraws them, leaving two bloody spots. "What kind of miscreant do you take me for?"

"Yourself," Momota says. Ouma laughs.

"Ha! Momota-chan is so funny." Ouma coos. "No, no. Momota-chan's lucky I found out! I mean, can you *imagine* if Iruma-chan got her hands on this hot info? But I care about Momota-chan's wellbeing. Looks like you got a little stroke of luck, huh! You're well overdue for one. I mean, with the casino, and the blood, and the... well, you know. Everything!"

Momota watches Ouma's fingers dance along his palm. The *everything*. He wishes a few fake-yen lost in the casino was his biggest issue, but Ouma's smiling at him like the Cheshire cat, and Momota feels like he already knows.

"That being said..." Ouma's voice trails off. "I'm only human, y'know! And sometimes things just come out! Especially if Saihara-chan starts asking where Momota-chan is at the trial. I'm just too honest! So... don't hold it against me if I make a little oopsie, kay?"

Momota had known Ouma wouldn't drop it so easily. Ouma wants and he wants and he wants: Momota, despite only having known him for days, has long understood that nothing with him comes for free. Ouma wants to bargain, but Momota's pockets are empty and his chest is filled with bile. He doesn't have anything to give.

"If you're looking for a trade, you're shit out of luck." Momota says. "I don't have anything."

The implication - that the reason Momota will never be able to pay Ouma back is because he'll never make it out alive - remains unsaid. Ouma's face shifts into a blank, unsettling expression.

"Momota-chan," Ouma says. "You don't have anything I want. Not right now. Sooo..." he smiles again, so suddenly that Momota thinks he might have imagined his demeanor changing. "I'm offering you a loan! A deal, even! And that's not a lie."

Ouma steps closer to the bed, with the soft *click-click-click* of tiny shoes. His palms press against the foot of the bed, but when he pulls one away, flicking his finger out to point at Momota, the sheets remain clean. The blood has already dried.

"I'll make sure you get to that trial safe and sound," Ouma says. His finger curls, and he examines it, like he's got a contract penned on his knuckle. "And all you need to do is promise to return the favor. If it comes to that. Even I can't be lucky all the time."

The first thing Momota thinks is that *this is too simple*. There must be some kind of catch - there always is, with





Ouma. His price is far too low; as things stand, Momota might not make it to the point where he *can* help him, if Ouma ever needs his help. Frankly, the fact that he’s asking for it is shocking enough, but Momota knows he’s offering him no vulnerability. This is a strategic decision, and Ouma knows Momota knows that, and Ouma knows that’s why Momota is going to say yes.

Momota has someone else’s vulnerability to protect, and Ouma looks at him with a gaze that knows that all too well. Shuichi can’t take another heartbreak.

“Okay,” Momota says, out of options. “It’s a deal.”

“An intelligent choice, Momota-chan,” Ouma says. “Especially coming from you!”

He gets up onto the bed, knees digging into the sheets. Then he reaches out, with his small, blood-stained hand.

“Let’s shake on it.” Ouma offers. Momota props himself up a little higher. *A blood pact*, if only with Momota’s. He doesn’t ask Ouma to offer any of his: he doesn’t need any more blood spilled.

Momota takes Ouma’s hand in a firm shake, gripping him and feeling his soft, cold skin, like Ouma, too, is merely a young corpse, and *then*–



*The hangar is dark, and Ouma is light.*

*He only has so much strength remaining, and so his full weight falls onto Momota, loath to waste it on keeping himself upright; even so, he’s easy to carry, rag-dolling into Momota’s arms. His head lolls forward. Momota keeps an eye on his thin, bony chest, the audible puffs of air that leave his lips. They’re bloody, like Momota’s arm, like Ouma’s back.*

*Like their hands, joined as Momota drags him to the press.*

*This time, it’s both of their blood, mingled to the point of being indifferentiable. The goal is to remain that way: he is Ouma, and Ouma is him, and not even the viewers, or Monokuma, or Shuichi can know. Momota almost feels like it’s more literal than figurative: with Ouma cradled to his chest, coughing up blood onto Momota’s shirt, he feels like a piece of him is forever sealed within his ribs. Like he’s about to free Ouma from the cage of his body - like he’ll walk into the trial haunted, by a spirit he can’t bring himself to call evil.*

*Neither of them speak, but Momota knows their contract is complete. Momota has seen his end of the bargain through - perhaps that’s why Ouma is smiling as Momota lays him into the press. Their hands are the last thing to separate. Ouma turns his head to look at him. Momota feels like the least he can do is not look away.*

*And the press comes down, and down, and down.*

“Well, that settles it!”

Ouma pulls his hand back, shaking it, like Momota has somehow contaminated him with the germs of impending death.

“I’m going to take *great* care of you, Momota-chan!” he coos. For some reason, Momota believes him; Ouma squeezed too hard, too painfully to not mean his words. Momota does not know what his future holds, but he does know that he will make it to the second trial.

“Sure,” Momota says. Ouma beams.

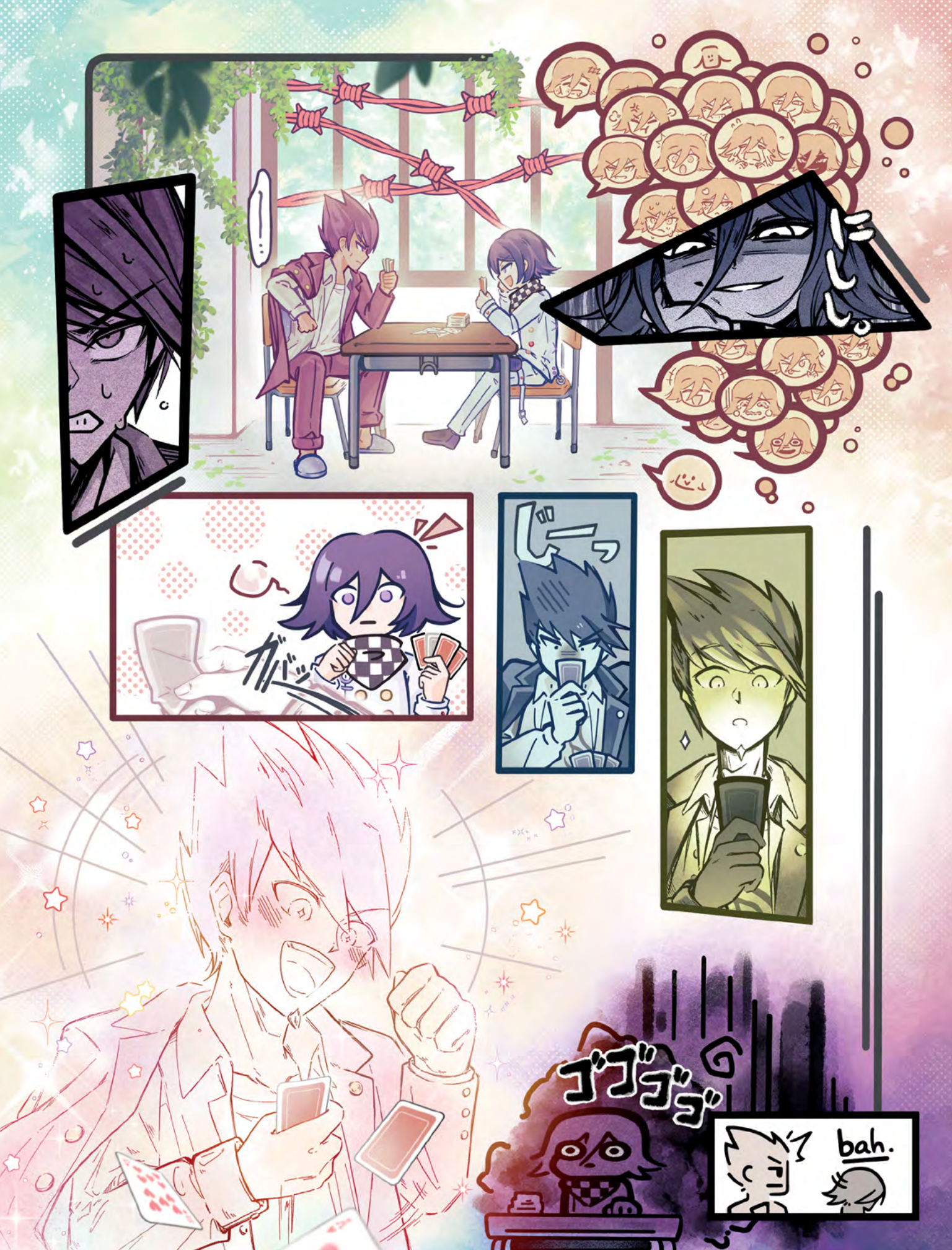
“I’ll be back with Momota-chan’s lunch!” Ouma says, and he slips out the door. Momota hears the *ba-dum, ba-dum, ba-dum* of his rhythmic skipping out into the courtyard.

Momota lays his head back down. Ouma is lucky, a little glowing embodiment of fortune. Deals fall into his hands, like moths to a flame, and now Momota has joined them. Momota won’t make it out of here, but - if, God forbid, Shuichi doesn’t - Ouma may have a shot.

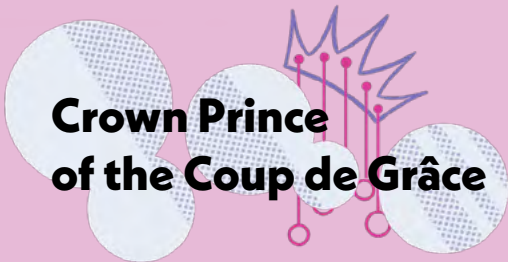
What could he possibly have to worry about?

- FIN -









# Crown Prince of the Coup de Grâce

It doesn't start with the coughing.

Here, nothing that kills you is willing to tip its hand so early. Ouma's well aware how important it is to count your metaphorical cards.

So, it doesn't start with blood behind his teeth and burning in his chest. It starts with the feeling something is categorically off when he wakes up, the morning after Toujou's execution.

Ouma still went to breakfast with a smile then, and he still does now. The only difference is that now, he makes damn sure to brush the blood out of his teeth first.



Some truths hide best in plain sight: Ouma's childishness may be a mask, but his sweet tooth is real.

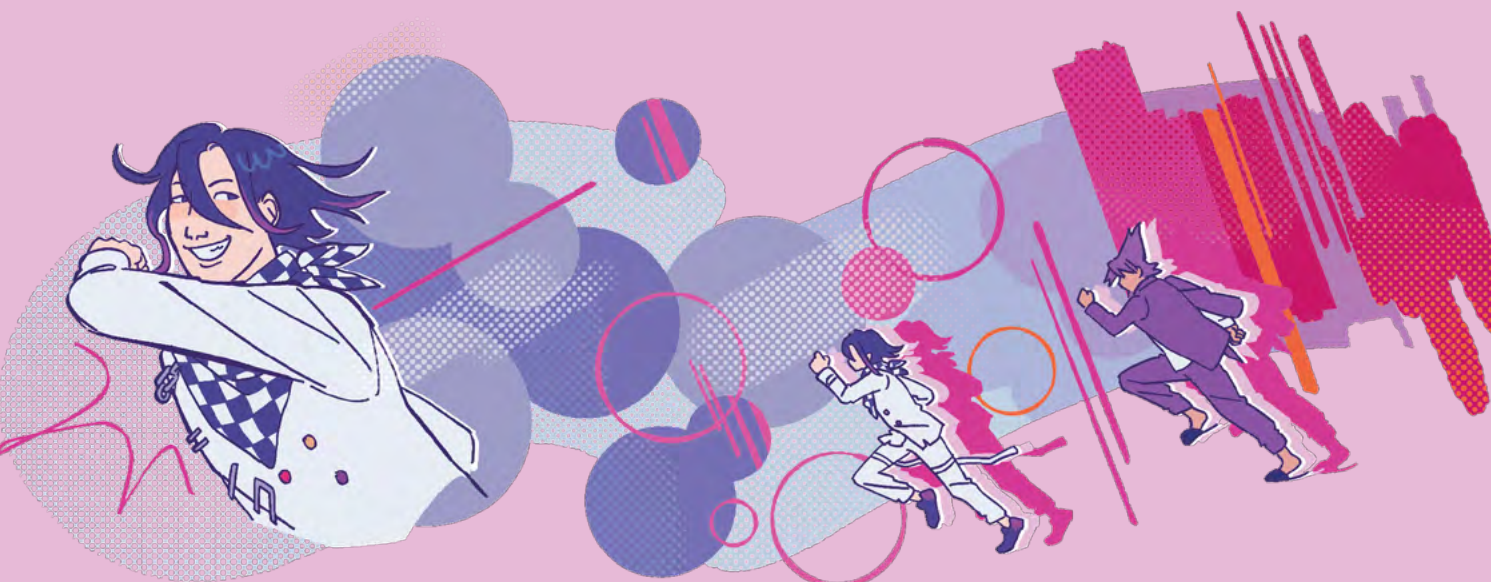
Adrenaline is sweet as it courses through him, beats through his veins and sharpens his senses to a point. It's sweet hearing Momota yell behind him, feeling the pounding of his feet beating out a rhythm that accompanies the astronaut's own lumbering gait.

It's so sweet, in fact, that Ouma can calculate the exact moment it turns sour.

Ouma doesn't let his manic smile fall even as his lungs begin to seize. He gasps in air through his grin, mind whirring to change plans from evasion to hiding. It's all well and good to duck under Momota's grasping arms, to swing around corners and skid down hallways, but this isn't a game anymore.

...Not one Ouma can afford to lose, that is.

Ouma uses the lead he's been upkeeping to get himself out of sight, then throws open the door of a nearby classroom. He darts right by it, pushing open the next door, and goes in that one instead, obscuring his trail. All he needs to do is throw the big lug off, and he'll be fine. He has to be.



Predictably, Momota goes flying towards the open classroom, the stupid sound of those stupid slippers creating a cacophony as he goes. What kind of guy runs in slippers like that?

It'd be funnier if Ouma's throat wasn't seizing up again. Though he keeps his mouth stubbornly closed, trying to force his body into submission, Ouma realizes almost too late that the liquid rising in his throat will suffocate him if he doesn't let it out.

It would be just *so* embarrassing to drown in his own lungs to the sound of those *stupid* slippers.

That's the justification, the final joke that flashes through his head before Ouma doubles over and lets his lungs attempt to evict themselves from his chest. For now, they stay in their place, but they do succeed in sending their contents spilling across the classroom floor.

Ouma dizzily wonders if blood has always been this color, so bright and glaring.

The footsteps outside stop, but Ouma can't. A glob of congealed *something* tears its way up and out his throat, and the pain is so searing he gasps and spasms as it hits the floor. Air forces its way back into his lungs just in time to escape again as another, final cough.

Blood throws itself in a cosmic spray all over the stupid space pattern on Momota's stupid slippers, and Ouma grins.

"Holy shit, Ouma." Momota says. "What the fuck--"

"Surprise!" Ouma gasps through the metallic taste in his mouth, and keels forward.



It takes a while to get Momota off his tail after that, but Ouma's nothing if not crafty. Back in his dorm, he rearranges his plans to revolve around playing off the illness, finding loopholes and lies that will make it suspicious rather than a weakness. He doubts Momota will be able to keep his big mouth shut, and he has to be ready for whatever idiotic questions are pushed at him by those that still care enough to ask.

That number has been dwindling. Ouma makes a few more notes on the ones most likely to take advantage of his weakness instead.



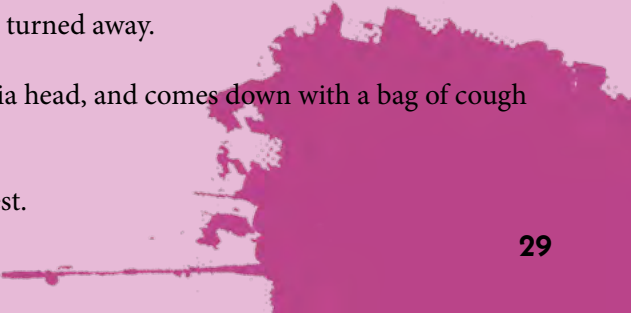
Something lands on his head, and Ouma curses himself for flinching. He'd heard the clip-clop of Momota's slippers approaching, but the guy tends to keep a distance. Or maybe Ouma does. It doesn't really matter.

Despite his discomfort, Ouma's grin is an extension of himself. It's wide and white and perfect as always. "What's up, Momota-chan?"

"Thought these might help." Momota isn't grinning: in fact, his face is turned away.

Ouma reaches up his hand to discover what Momota's given to him via head, and comes down with a bag of cough drops.

They're grape flavor. Something more than a cough crushes in his chest.





“Thanks, but no thanks, Momota-chan.” Ouma rolls his eyes, and keeps walking. Making sure Momota’s still following, he deposits the bag directly into a nearby trash can. “I only believe in traditional medicines.”

Momota is too occupied with trying to fish the bag out of the trash to stop him as he slips away.

The next morning, Ouma steps outside of his dorm and directly into something warm and wet spilling over his shoes. This time the grin doesn’t come as easily, and he can’t help his grimace.

The goopy mess of porridge now soaking into his socks shows no mercy for a sick man.

It’s *okayu*, he recognizes. Soft on the stomach, a light and comforting dish for people not feeling well enough for normal meals.

In some act of rebellion against nothing, ultimately useless, Ouma kicks the bowl over.

He eats breakfast in the cafeteria, as usual. It grates against his throat in a way that he knows full well *okayu* wouldn’t. Ouma grits his teeth, and swallows back blood.

Everything goes too fast in the hangar. It’s the crux of all the blood and pain and everything else Ouma has become familiar with the last few weeks. The end is approaching, he knows, but he can’t even bring himself to feel much about it. Business as usual: he coughs, he hurts, he gets ready to die. Trite, really.

It’s all so *boring*.

Except for one thing that still bothers him.

The metal of the press should be cold against his back, except Momota’s jacket is under him, and it’s just slightly warm. It must be from Momota: Ouma’s far past the point of making his own body heat. He’s been shivering the last ten minutes.

“Momota-chan, I have a question.”

Momota looks up at him with dull, miserable eyes from where he’s been perusing the script Ouma penned for him. Jeez, can’t he even pretend to be happy he gets to live *and* be the hero of this story?

“What’s with your fetish for lost causes?”

That makes Momota sputter, a little spark of life coming back into him to rear back at the words. The spark jumps to Ouma in return, a cruel kind of joy at the reaction. He’s still got it.

“What the fuck are you on about?” Momota recovers, spitting the words out with a familiar frustration.

“I mean, I’m the latest in your parade of them, aren’t I? The sad little detective who doesn’t even want to be a detective, the assassin who still can’t solve stuff with anything but violence, and now me! The dastardly, manipulative supreme leader that you’re still following into murder. Though really...” Ouma snickers. “I think you knew all along, Momota-chan. There’s no saving any of us.”

Momota visibly wars between indignance for the sake of his sidekicks and not falling for Ouma’s bait. A giggle wobbles its way through Ouma’s chest, a sick delight in having inspired some emotion in those dull eyes.

“Don’t say that shit about my sidekicks,” He settles on, ever-defensive. “But I... had a feeling. That this game wouldn’t let you survive whatever sick shit it’s given you.”

“Then why’d you waste your precious time, huh? Could’ve been beefing up your sidekicks, or yourself, or building us a real rocket ship to get out of here. And instead you made *porridge*.” Ouma mocks.

“First of all, I don’t waste *any* time.” Momota grouses. “I know time management! And there’s no way I could make a working rocket. I’m not an engineer, I’m an *astronaut*.”

*But...?*

“I wanted you to know. Someone would take care of you.”

Ouma’s lip curls. “Like it helped at all. Momota-chan’s a pretty shitty nurse. Must suck to know all of that was for nothing, huh?”

“Not really. I got what I wanted, either way.”

Ouma’s eyes narrow. “What?”

“Those cough drops weren’t in the garbage can when I checked later.”

“That’s because you fished them out, Momota-chan.” Ouma rolls his eyes. “Gross, nasty Momota-chan, trying to give me garbage diseases too!”

“I left them there.” Momota holds his ground. “And they weren’t there when I got back.”

“I sure hope they’ll do something about those pesky garbage-stealing bears when I’m gone!”

Momota lolls his head back against the press, giving way. “Yeah. I hope so.

...Did they at least make your throat feel better?”

They did, is the thing. It was temporary, a band-aid on a bleed-out wound, but they did stave it off. Just for a bit.

“I discovered I’m allergic to grape, actually.” Ouma lies. “My throat was closing up and everything, I almost died ahead of time! But I didn’t want poor Momota-chan to end up the blackened, so I powered through it.”

Momota doesn’t even entertain that one, just staring at him.

“...But that was a lie.” Ouma sighs, yielding. “If I did actually take them, I definitely would’ve been





alllll better for Assassin-chan to plant her arrows in me and make sure I died anyways.”

That’s the thing, isn’t it? He was meant to die. It’s scripted, a part of the game. Ouma Kokichi is someone everyone wants dead.

But Momota—

“Look, Ouma. No matter how much you’re *trying* to make me feel shitty about helping you, I don’t. Even if it wasn’t gonna save you, even if it’s not now, and everything is fucked and I’m gonna have to kill you anyways—“

Momota starts cracking for real then, nails digging into his palms. “If I could at least– help you feel a little less shitty. Then it mattered. It wasn’t wasted time. I… wouldn’t waste time on you.”

There’s a long beat of silence.

“This *is* a waste of time.” Ouma says, finally.

Momota rears up to glare at him, incensed that his kindness got such a flippant reaction. “C’mon, Ouma! I just spilled my freakin’ heart to you, and you—“

It takes an embarrassing amount of effort to move his arm enough to shove his palm over Momota’s face, to silence him. “I’m not *done*,” Ouma wheezes.

His hand falls, cradling Momota’s jaw, smearing pink in his stupid little goatee.

“I like wasting people’s time.” Ouma grins through a mouth of blood. “So you fulfilled my wish.”

Momota stills, his mouth finally shutting. His eyes search Ouma’s, like he can find the truth in there. Ouma thinks he’s made it pretty obvious, but Momota-chan is pretty thick.

“...You’re such a fucking weirdo,” Momota says eventually.

Ouma’s resulting laugh is more of a wheeze than anything. “Momota-chan is so good at stating the obvious.”

A moment of silence passes between them, and Ouma wants to break it, but he knows he doesn’t have to. Not with the way that Momota looks at him: like he’ll really grieve, for something more than just wasted time.

But no matter how much or little they’ve wasted on each other, they don’t have any time left now.

“C’mon, Momota-chan,” Ouma rasps. “If you wanna be so nice, put me out of my misery.”

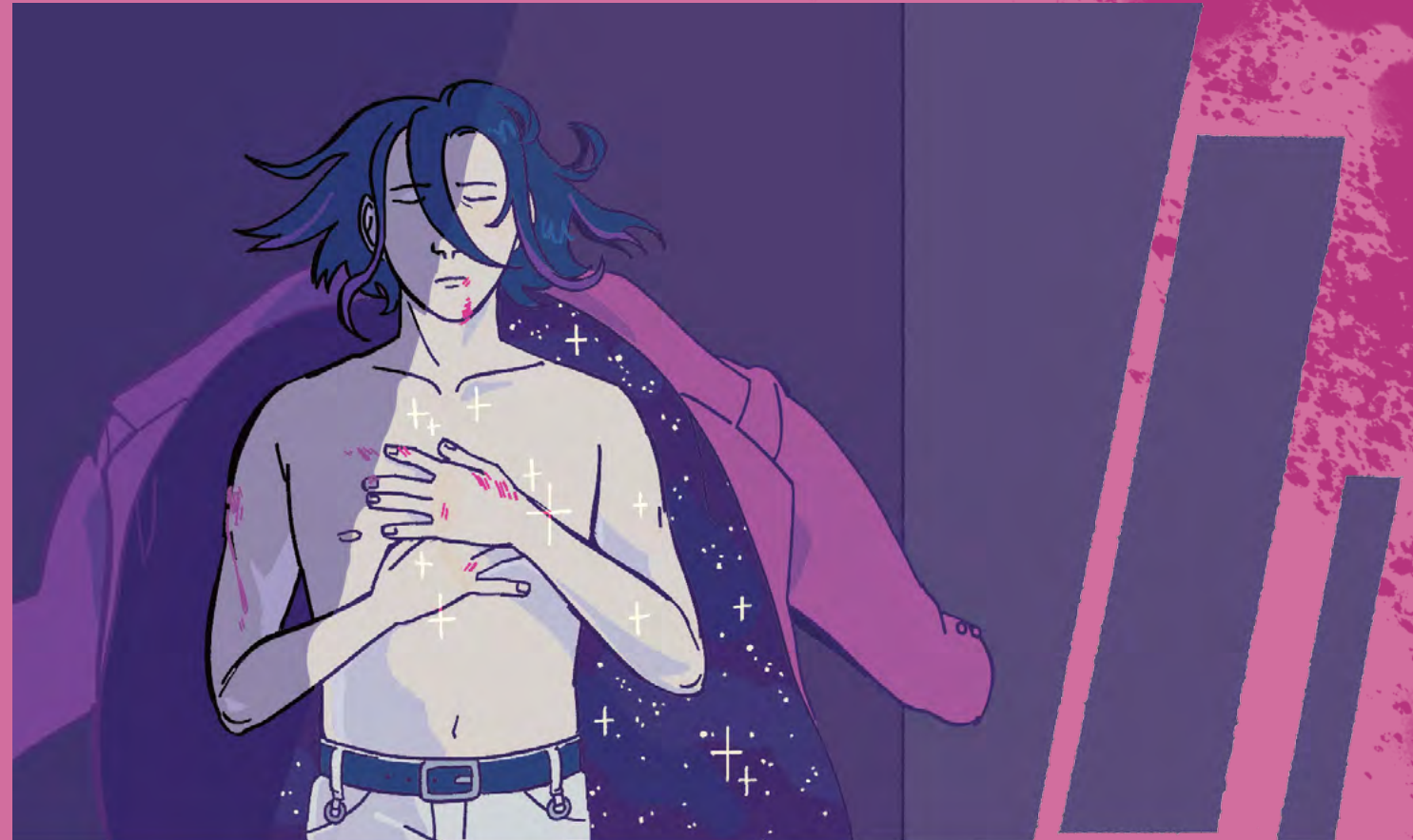
Momota touches his face in return. He’s warm. Who gave him the right to be so *warm*? The warmth is already fading from his jacket, Ouma having sucked it all up greedily with his ailing body. Like he could take one final thing from Momota.

He’s always been selfish. Even now, he wants to take more from Momota. He wants to take and

take, to see what Momota can give, more than medicines and hope and warmth. Momota could be more than this. So could Ouma, he knows.

But that’s not how these things go. Ouma’s a realist, if nothing else, and he can feel cold all he wants as Momota leaves his side, but nothing’s going to change that this is how it was always going to be.

He closes his eyes as the press hums back into action, and holds on to the last bit of warmth left in him. Ouma Kokichi might die here, but he’ll die with a little bit of Momota Kaito grasped in his greedy hands.



He’s always been selfish that way.











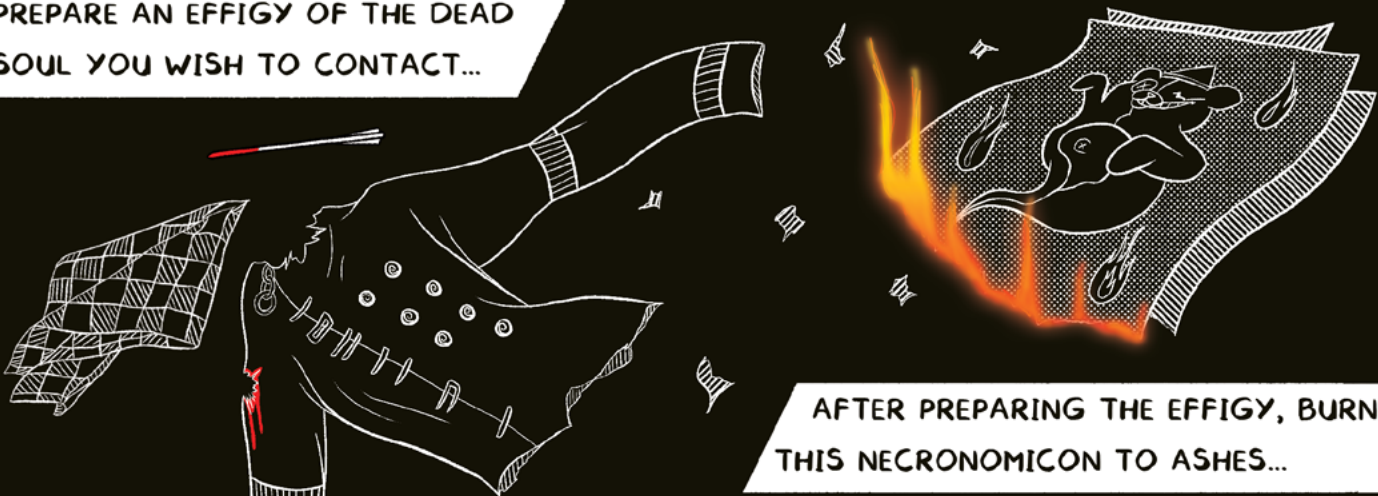


CHAPTER 3:  
STAR-CROSSED  
DOUBLE-CROSSED





PREPARE AN EFFIGY OF THE DEAD  
SOUL YOU WISH TO CONTACT...



AFTER PREPARING THE EFFIGY, BURN  
THIS NECRONOMICON TO ASHES...

SPRINKLE THE ASHES ON THE EFFIGY AND REPEAT THE NAME OF THE DECEASED THREE TIMES.

KOKICHI OUMA, KOKICHI OUMA KOKICHI OUMA

AFTER A WHILE,  
YOU SHOULD FEEL  
A LIGHT TAP  
ON YOUR BACK.  
IF SO, THAT  
MEANS  
THE  
RITUAL  
WAS A  
SUCCESS!



## THE BUDDY SYSTEM

To top it all off, Kaito doesn't see how this even counts as a motive.

Maybe that isn't fair. At first glance, this new circumstance seems more like a screwed-up way to raise the stakes than a temptation; god forbid anyone get bored amidst the repeating death-cycle. But now that he thinks about it, he does feel a *little* more murderous than his normal standard. (Which isn't to say that he feels murderous. As the one-to-ten scale goes, he's gone from a zero to a one, give or take a point-five. Just enough for him to respect the principle of the situation.)

Monokuma and his Kubs are calling it "The Buddy System." Since it was announced earlier today, Kaito has topped his previous record of daily swear-word usage, spent hours groveling after his least favorite fellow killing-game hostage, and had to contend with his own lack of honest faith in his classmates to stop killing one another, as demonstrated by the last thing. For all he's tried to convince himself that Kirumi's death would mark the end of the killing, he wouldn't be stooping to this level if he actually believed that.

Kaito has been on the floor outside of Kokichi's room for almost two hours, now. Why? Well, the Monokubs put it like this—

Rule 1: The students will be separated into partners. Partnerships cannot be rejected, negotiated, or traded, and go into effect upon being assigned.

Rule 2: As soon as one partner is killed, the other will die.

Rule 3: If the blackened earns their freedom by remaining undiscovered, then their partner is also granted freedom.

With arguably the worst choice of partner to be trapped in this nightmare scenario with, Kaito is pretty hyper-focused on Rule 2. His only strategy is to stick with Kokichi 24/7 so they can look out for each other. In a perfect world, when Kaito turns up at Kokichi's door— gravely serious, wearing pajamas and holding his fluffiest pillow— Kokichi welcomes him inside and agrees that this is a necessary safety measure for them both. In this world, Kokichi laughs in his face and locks him out.

But, like— it's all good. It's fine. Things could be way worse. The night is calm, and there have been no new deaths, and Kaito will find a way to shake some sense into his partner. He just— first he has to actually—





“No way.”

Kaito shrieks. When he looks up, his eyes meet Kokichi’s, which sparkle with a brand of surprise that Kaito hasn’t seen him wear before. Could be genuine.

“You fell *asleep*?”

“No!” Kaito cries, and this is true, but he *was* zoned-out enough not to notice Kokichi opening his door, which is admittedly not-awesome of him. He’s tired, okay? This wouldn’t be an issue if Kokichi would just let him in. “I was– meditating. On the situation. Shut up!”

“I didn’t realize you were so determined to make yourself a target!” Kokichi plows on incredulously. He seems a little offended, actually. “Passing out in the dimly-lit hallway, alone at midnight, nothing but your faith in the power of friendship to protect you. You totally just canceled your will to live, huh? Figured you’d throw in the towel already?”

Kaito stands up, glaring. Kokichi is significantly smaller than him, but stares back with his hands on his waist and his head tilted up, not a lick intimidated.

“Look,” Kaito says. “I wouldn’t be risking my life *or yours* right now if you’d just let me come inside to keep *both of us* safe.”

“Poor Kaito, I bet your room is teeming with deranged killers even as we speak! I forgot my door was the only one that could lock. Oh, wait.”

Kaito glares harder, and Kokichi glares right back, but in a way that makes Kaito feel like he’s being made fun of. So he relaxes. Braces himself. Then–

“Kokichi… please?”

Kokichi squints harder, less bullying and more scrutinizing. “...Well,” he says after a pause, “If my company is really so important to you, then I guess I’m obliged. But we’re taking your room. And I get the bed.”

They take Kaito’s room. Kokichi gets the bed. Spoiled brat.

From the floor, Kaito frowns at his back and determines to protect him with everything in his power.

Arguably, Kokichi does the reverse, making himself more scarce than he is under normal circumstances. Kaito spends the next day trapped in a cycle– tracking him down, trying to keep an eye on him, somehow losing him again within thirty minutes or less. It’s infuriating. Irrationally, Kaito starts to feel like a creep– like he’s stalking him or something– which pisses him off more. Who is Kokichi to make him feel that way when he’s the one trying to keep both of them safe?

“Wow, you guys are getting strong!” Kokichi remarks chipperly. “Another few sessions and you might finally be

ready to fist-fight Monokuma! He’s an awfully big teddy bear, but with three against one, you might have a fighting shot.”

He’s happy to come and observe their nightly training, at least.

“Ignore him,” Kaito mutters through clenched teeth. Reminding his sidekicks, kinda, but mostly himself.

Shuichi and Maki are partnered with one another. It seems to be going well– *they’ve* stuck together since the motive announcement. And while Shuichi might be a little intimidated, the Ultimate Assassin is an ambitious murder target, so he’s safer than most.

“Y’know, Kaito, even if we get killed tomorrow, at least I’ll get to say that I spent my final hours watching you guys do squats.”

Unless Maki snaps and takes them both out herself. Kaito wouldn’t count this out as a possibility. Her right eye has been twitching an awful lot tonight.

Kokichi’s heckling gets less creative as he starts to run out of ideas. “Shuichi. Hey, Shuichi. You call that a sit-up?”

“If he wasn’t your partner, I’d strangle him,” Maki grumbles.

“Maki,” Shuichi begins.

And then Kokichi goes, “I wouldn’t have thought there’d be so much thrusting involved in–”

“Shut *up*!” Maki shrieks, rolling to her feet and whirling around faster than Kaito would’ve thought humanly possible. “Just shut the hell up, Kokichi!”

Kaito twists just in time to see Kokichi’s expression shift from startled to bored. “...Fine,” he states. And that’s it.

There’s a beat before Maki turns back around and resumes her workout.

The next two minutes of silence are a welcome relief. The third and fourth are impressive.

The fifth one is suspicious.

Kaito stops, turns around, and sighs. “God damn it.”

“Do you need help searching?” Shuichi offers.

“Nah. He can’t have gone far.”

“Good luck,” Maki says, as Kaito embarks on his eighth journey of the day to hunt down his stupid motive partner.

Things progress in an interesting way. They bicker, which Kaito anticipated–

“Just cooperate, man! You’re being a dick!”

“Wow, real nice words for the guy *with your life in his hands*, Momota.”





But then they start to work together, kind of.

“Look, I’ll play rock-paper-scissors with you as many times as you want. Just please stop wandering off down dark corridors whenever I turn my back.”

“Fine! But I won’t go easy on you.”

And then they sort of start to get along?

“You take the bed tonight. I’m tired of your mattress fleas.”

“What? No, I’m fine. Just go to sleep, Kokichi.”

And then Kaito makes a dumb joke–

“Hey, Kaito, your jacket has a hole in the back, you know?”

“Oh man. Must be from the fleas.”

–And Kokichi actually laughs. And Kaito wasn’t smiling before he started laughing, but now he is, and maybe that’s not a coincidence? Like. He’s looking at Kokichi and it’s like– some unanticipated emotions are happening. It’s very weird.

But they make eye-contact and Kokichi stops laughing. He goes to use the bathroom, then comes back and goes to bed without another word.

And then he disappears again.



Of course he’s not at breakfast and no one’s seen him all morning. Kaito runs around searching for roughly an hour, heart-rate accelerating with physical exertion and maybe some mild panic.

The reason Kokichi is so difficult to locate probably has to do with the fact that his location makes no fucking sense. He’s hiding out in Miu’s lab. Miu isn’t even with him. Kaito finds him just, like, sitting on a bench, reading some manual.

“Hey Momo–”

“What the hell, Kokichi?” Kaito bursts.

Kokichi doesn’t miss a beat. “Lovely, thanks; how has *your* morning been?”

“This isn’t funny!” Kaito stalks forward and rips the booklet out of Kokichi’s hands, tossing it to the side, fuming.

Kokichi seems unfazed. “I’m not laughing.”

“You– are you–?” Kaito struggles for a moment. “I don’t get it. I thought we were…”

He groans. Kokichi is frowning.

“I don’t know what I thought,” Kaito mumbles. “I guess I thought you were starting to take this seriously. That your own life– that *my* life– that it was worth it to–”

“We aren’t friends,” Kokichi says abruptly, which, *Jesus*. “I’m not concerned about your life, if that’s what you thought. You know that, right? You know that I don’t care about you?”

Kaito’s heart is in his stomach. Kokichi leans down and picks the discarded manual back up.

“If you want to keep following me around like a dumb baby animal, I won’t stop you,” he continues nonchalantly, flipping the book back open. “But you shouldn’t expect me to reciprocate. Or wait around for you.”

“...What the *hell*?” Kaito presses, voice cracking a little. “I– I don’t understand you.”

Kokichi glances back up. “No? I mean, I’m speaking pretty clearly,” he retorts. “*Really* listen up this time, got it? I *don’t*. Want. To hang out with you. I don’t care what Monokuma said. We aren’t partners.”

“Fine,” Kaito states, shock melting back down into anger. “Fine! Okay, that’s– you really want to sneak off and get us both killed? You really hate me *that much*? Whatever, man.”

This time, Kaito is the one to ditch Kokichi.

He sits in his room for about an hour before the Body Discovery Announcement goes off.



The good news is that Kaito isn’t dead. The bad news? Monokuma never specified *when* the victim’s partner was to die. As far as anyone’s aware, there could be a showy execution set-up waiting for them at the scene of the crime. Monokuma isn’t one to waste an opportunity for spectacle. So... the victim could be anyone.

Kaito is *running*.

Angie’s lab. Where the hell is Angie’s lab, again? He rounds a corner, then another, before slamming into something hard–

“Fuck!” “Ow.”

Upon stumbling back and taking a moment to process what just happened, Kaito registers the thing he slammed into as Kokichi Ouma.

“Oh,” Kokichi says, relief written all over him for just a moment before he throws up a mask of indifference.

Kaito has no such qualms, nearly fainting as he privately thanks any god who can hear him. It must show, because Kokichi’s nonchalant expression quickly slides into an incredulous frown–

“Are you having a panic attack?” he asks.

Kaito shakes his head and means to say *no*, although he finds himself unable to form words with how hard he’s wheezing. One hand goes over his pounding heart. The other clamps onto Kokichi’s shoulder.

It’s the running, is all. His– his lungs are bad.



“...Momo—”

“No,” Kaito bursts, finally, “I– wasn’t panicking. I just– you– I couldn’t– you’re *okay*?”

He looks up at Kokichi’s face, still slightly bent over. To be fair, Kaito could probably answer his own question. The guy seems more or less alive.

“I’m fine,” Kokichi states, squinting. “*You’re* fine. Look, I was never going to put your life in any danger, okay? Stop freaking out.”

“I’m not– what? You–”

Jesus, yeah. The fucking motive.

“Oh,” Kaito continues. “I– yeah. That’s... okay, well. Good.”

“Great,” Kokichi agrees. “Surely that reassurance is enough for you to get through the rest of today in your own personal bubble.”

Legitimately, he forgot about the motive. How the hell did he forget about the motive? Well– he didn’t *forget*, he just– wasn’t thinking about dying. He was thinking about Kokichi dying.

“Kaito.”

“What?”

“Let go of my shoulder.”

Right. Except– “I don’t, um, want to?”

Kokichi’s face is stony. Unreadable. Kaito would be unnerved, except that he’s just sort of not.

And then Kokichi sighs. Becomes unreadable in a different way. “Fine. Whatever, sidekick,” he mutters, grabbing Kaito’s hand from his shoulder and removing it without letting go of it, then leading him down the rest of the hallway.







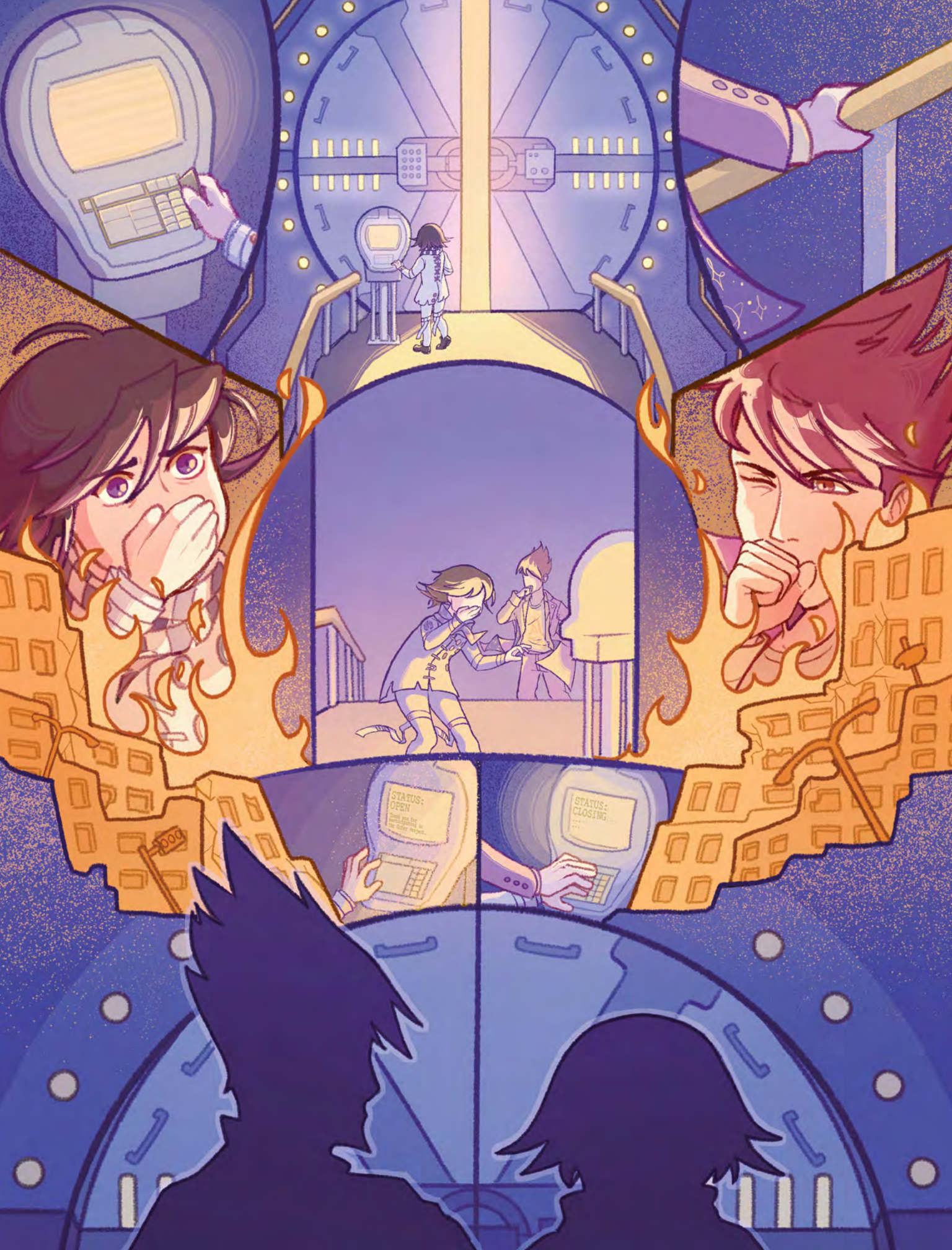








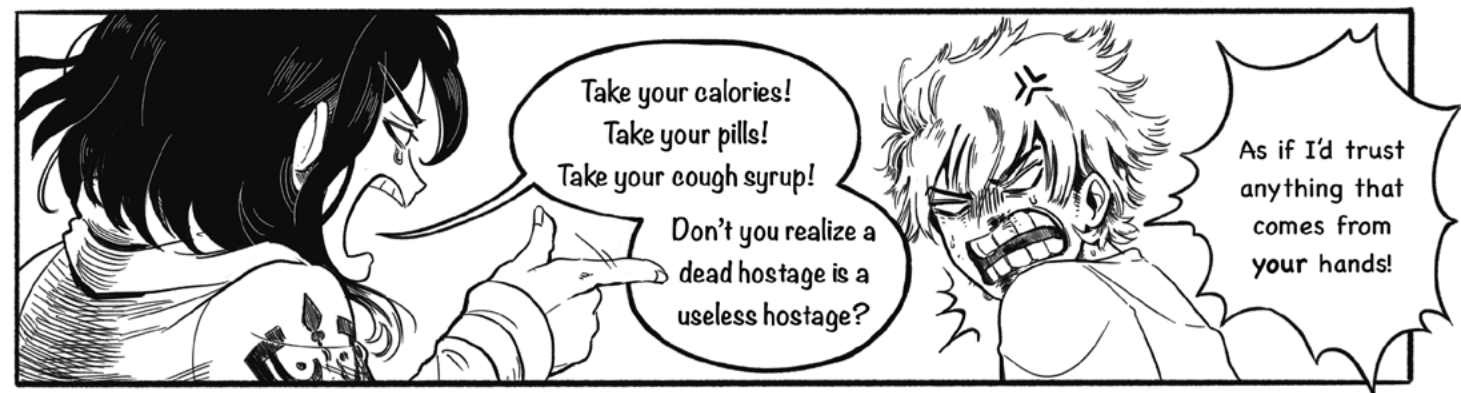




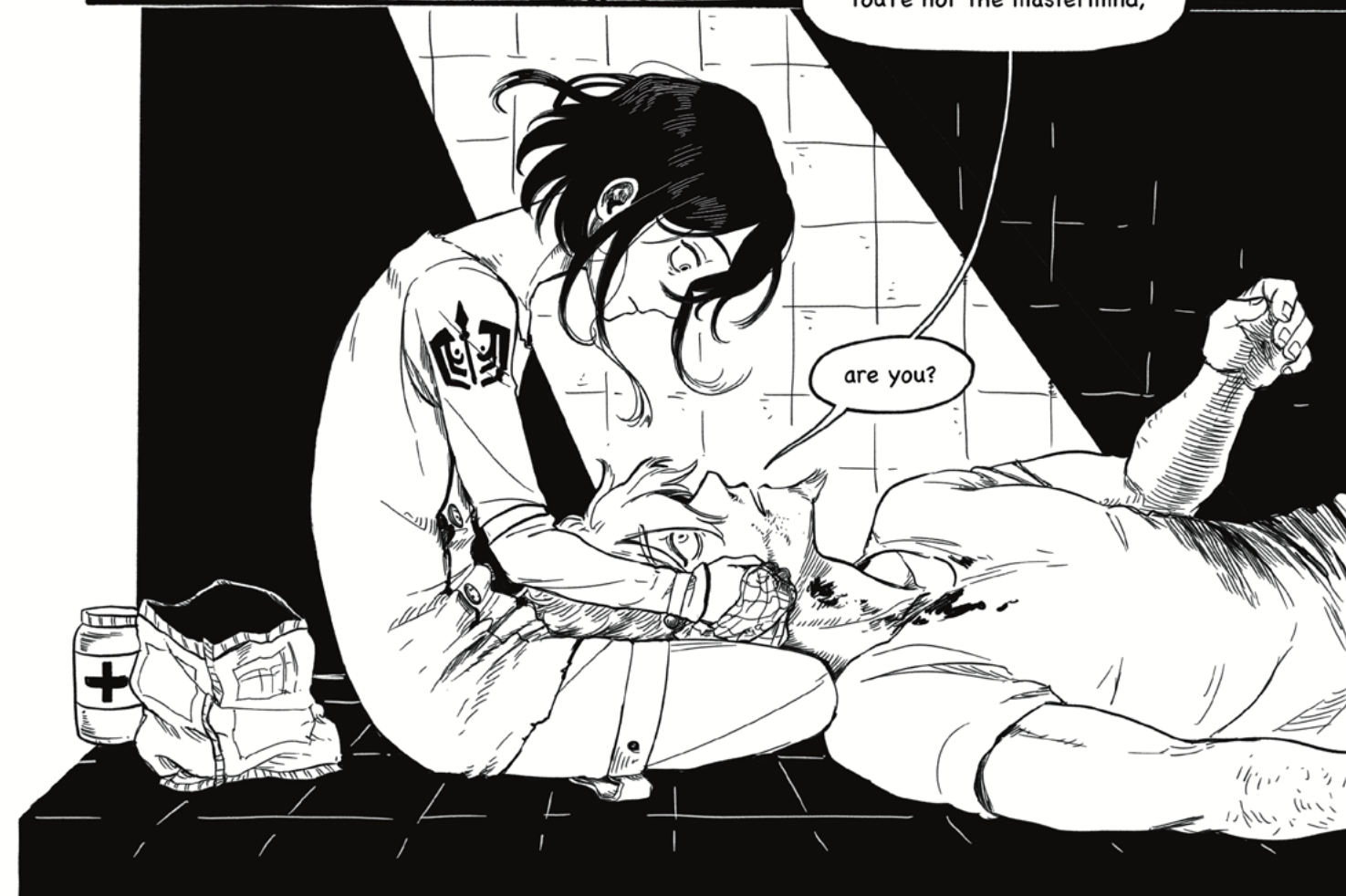
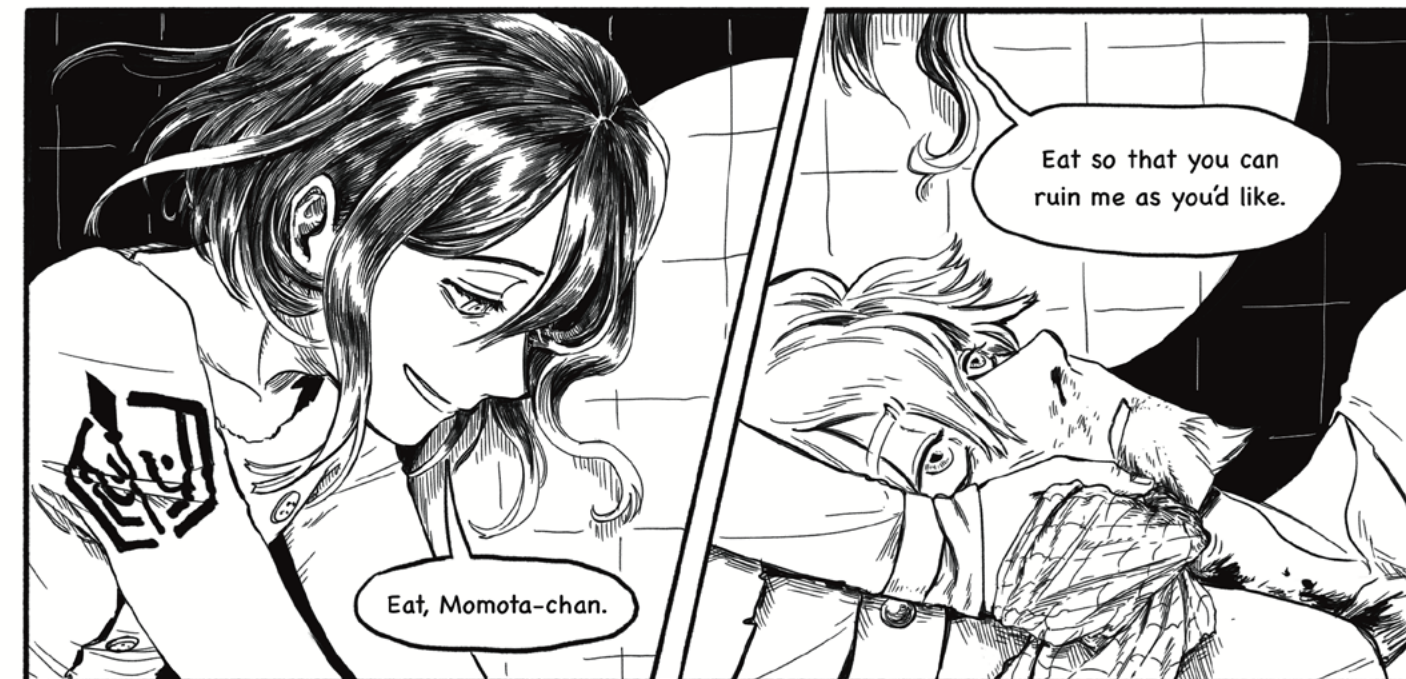
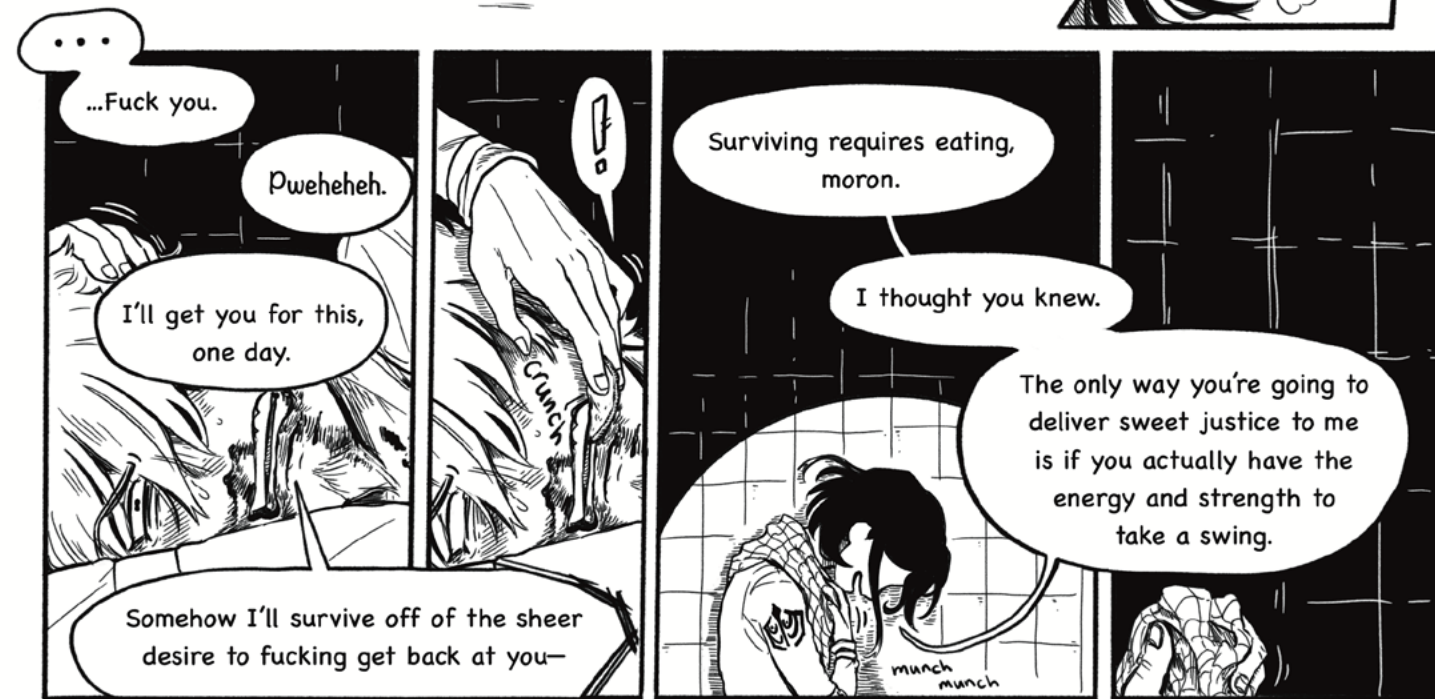
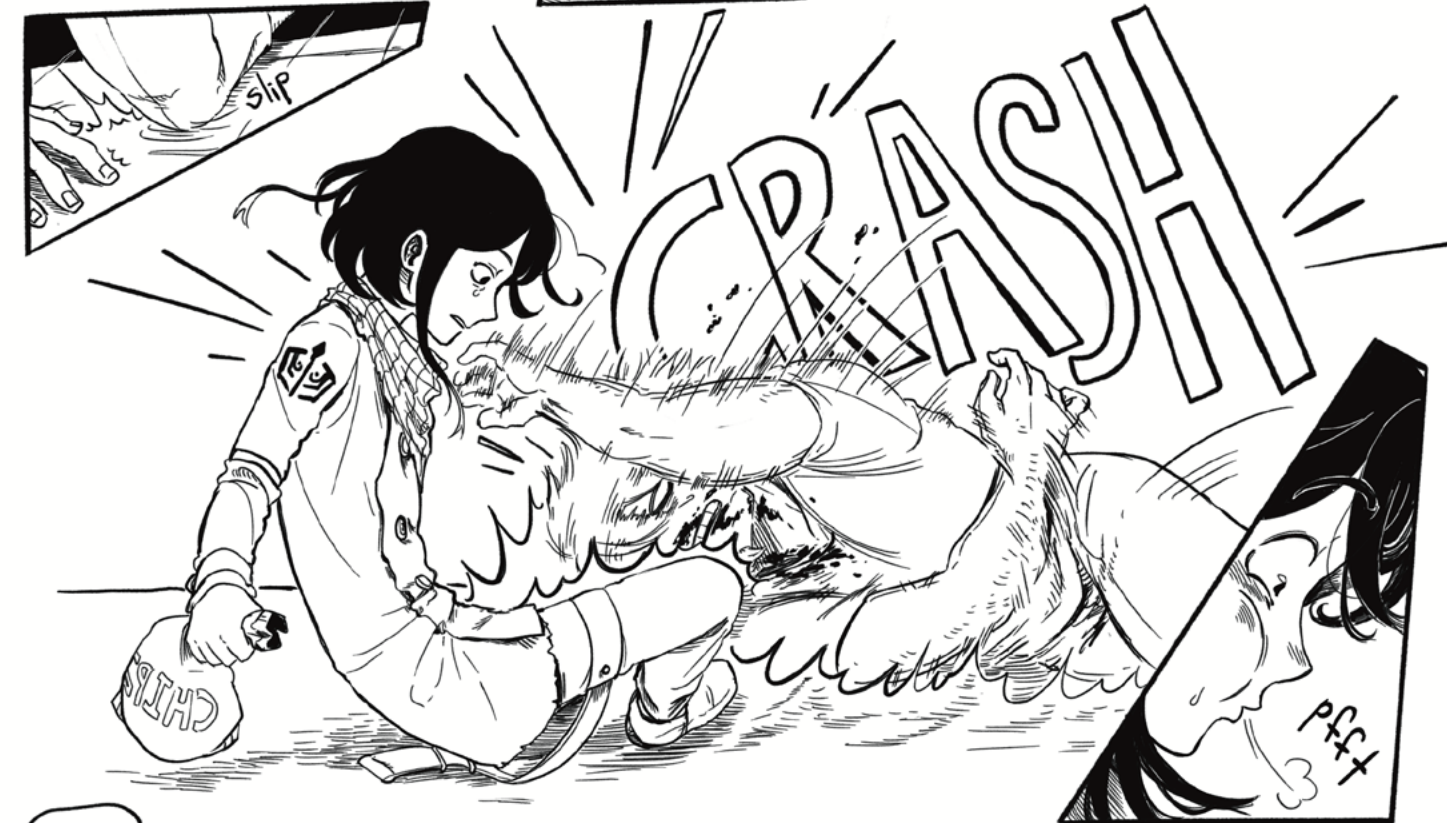
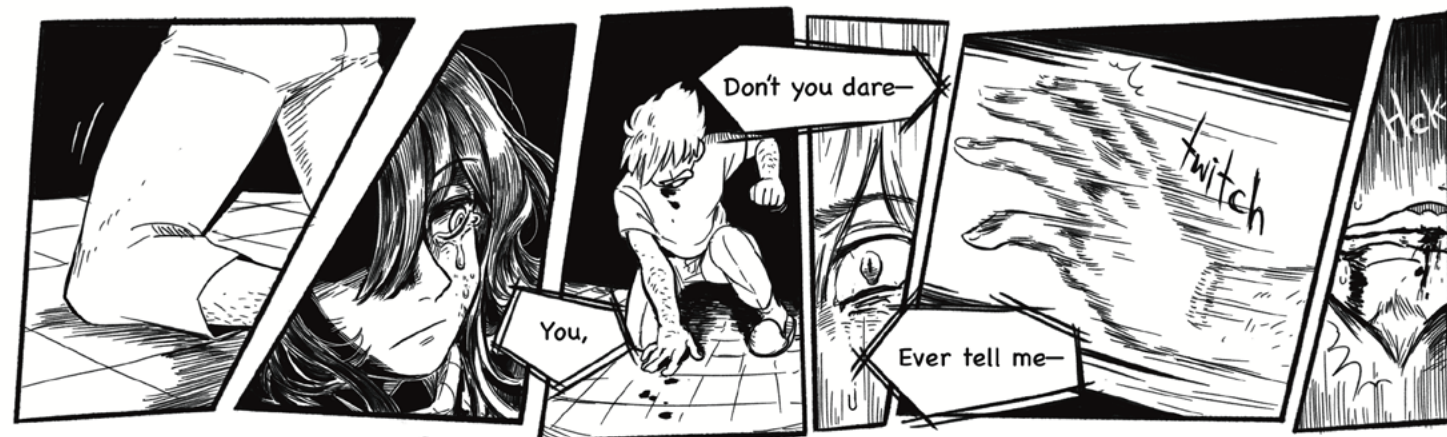














# FLASHBACK BLUES



“N-No way...” Yumeno shudders out, drawing her hat down further over her eyes. “Saihara already said that we need to be really careful not to hurt each other... And that includes Ouma! *Especially* Ouma, right now! Even if he’s a jerkface...”

“Look, but—one arrow’s not gonna hurt him for real!” Kaito insists. “I think the crossbow’d really just make him stop and listen, which is the only—”

“Nyehhhh!” Yumeno whines before covering her ears and shaking her head.



“—way I can think of to make him talk to me! C’mon! We’re just gonna hash it out like men, and it’ll really only help me...y’know, *persuade* him to—”

It’s too late. Yumeno babbles out a clipped apology before she skitters off down the corridor.

*Well, fuck!* Kaito thinks, his resulting groan echoing off the ceiling. He knows that had he asked Shuichi and Harumaki just an hour prior—when they’d poked their heads through the little square of window to deliver the news, concern and confidence in both their gazes—his sidekicks would’ve had even worse reactions than Yumeno did, but... Still, Kaito had been expecting Yumeno to hear him out at least *slightly* more than she actually did! The bottoms of his palms rise up to cover his eyes, blotting out the sea-green fluorescence.

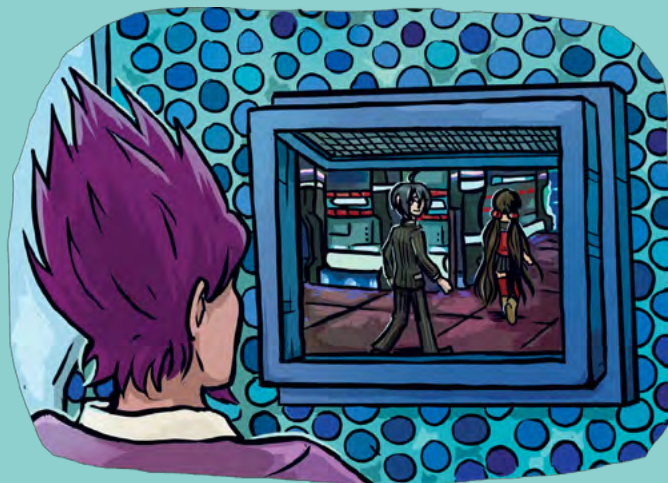
“...*which is why I don’t think Ouma-kun is the mastermind,*” Shuichi had said. The words repeat over the marbled universe behind Kaito’s eyelids.

“*H-Harukawa-san said something this morning, along with Kiibo-kun, that made me realize that... All the information we’ve been supplied is incongruous.*”

“*Whoever placed that flashback light there wanted someone to kill Ouma-kun in order to continue the killing game.*”

And once it’d all spilled out, Kaito had no doubt that Shuichi was right. Weeks’ worth of planning wouldn’t culminate in that sort of mistake—Ouma had proven time and time again that he was far too conniving for a slip-up of that caliber. Shuichi and Harumaki had agreed with Kaito just as much, and once they’d announced their intent to bring the others and rescue him the following morning—without weapons, with a sheer hope that the Electrohammers could handle the Exisals—Kaito knew just what he could do to help them out in turn. But now, without Yumeno’s assistance, he’s floundering at square one.

He can’t just take on Ouma bare-knuckled, can he...? There’s no way the kid won’t have the Exisal remote



on him when he opens the door. Every time he’d shown his face the past couple of days, he always had a hand hovering over his pocket—which was convenient, actually, but also incredibly dangerous—but Kaito couldn’t just wait this out anymore... Not when he’d already been wasting away like a prisoner, day and night.

So what else could he do? Play dead and wait for Ouma to tiptoe over with his defenses lowered? Hide in the corner and launch an ambush? He’s still pacing around, scratching the back of his neck feverishly when not even five minutes later, his metaphorical cell door clunks open and reveals—as always—Ouma’s mawkish, untroubled smile.

Kaito freezes mid-stride and blinks at him. Ouma blinks back, a quick one-two.

“Wow, look at you...” Ouma says. It’s almost a murmur, almost to himself, and then that childlike smile gains the slightest edge. “You’ve finally cracked and gone stir-crazy in here, now *haven’t* you, Hostage-chan?”

Ouma’s hand is draped over his front pocket. He follows Kaito’s gaze through the silence, and he’s only just beginning to reach inside when Kaito miraculously decides—*plan A!*—sprints forward, and pounces on him.

“Heeeyyyyy!” Ouma cries, twisting sideways to avoid the first punch Kaito throws. His only punch,

really—the quick dodge leaves Ouma tangled between his arms, and Kaito’s hissing out, “What the fu—hold still, motherfucker!” with his cheek against the top of the kid’s head when Ouma, grappling the remote out of his grasp, yells, “Momota-chan, you *freak!*” and just chucks the thing out the door and into the sterile light.

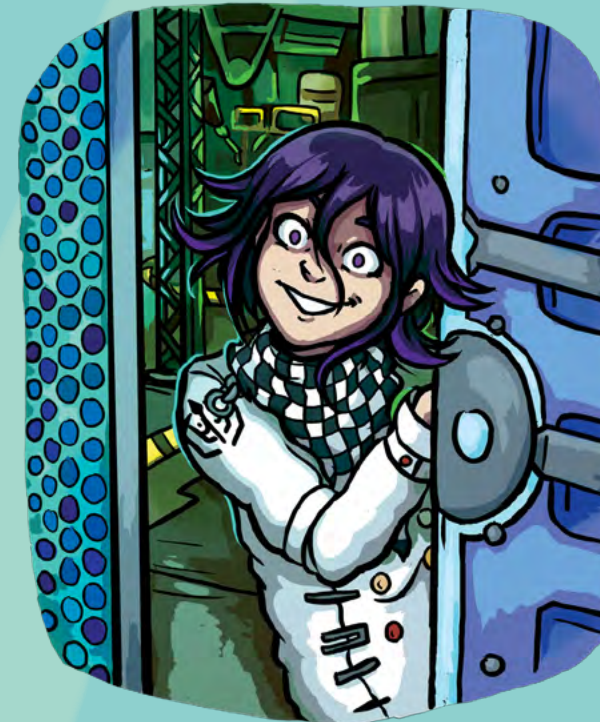
“Fuck!” Kaito gasps. There’s a half second where Ouma winds closer to him, but before he can slingshot away, Kaito plants two hands on his shoulder blades, quick as he can, and throws him to the floor. With one great lunge, Kaito’s able to perch his right foot ahead of Ouma’s toppled form, but before he can land the left one to sprint off, five tiny fingers grip his ankle and send Kaito crashing down as well. Ouma’s up in record time and nearly leapfrogs over his back, but Kaito’s arm shoots up, searching blindly for anything, and he grabs a loose lock of Ouma’s hair. The tension pulls him back down with a shrill sound, and before long, they’re both on their knees jeering and swatting at each other.

Ouma’s got ahold of his hand when Kaito slides his foot aside in an impulsive attempt to stand, and in a simultaneously stunning yet predictable moment of zero integrity from the kid, Ouma lifts his knee to land what Kaito does, in fact, consider a very dishonorable LOW BLOW to send him spiraling to the floor again.

“Fucking—OWWWW!” Kaito shouts. It’s a far cry from getting his feet under him—now his forehead’s on the tile.

“What the—OWWW! What the *FUCK*, Ouma!”

He spends the next few seconds clenching his jaw, trying to dull the blood pounding in his ears—*God*, what an unbearable ringing—when distantly, overtop it, he hears that little patter of shoes dissipating, then returning. Kaito sets his hands on the floor for support and with a groan,







manages to slouch halfway up.

Ouma, the Exisal remote in hand, pointedly takes a step backwards and stares at him.

“Fucking shit, dude,” Kaito grits through his clenched teeth, “I just wanted to talk to you!”

Ouma purses his lips. “See, I feel like we’re not being totally honest here, Momota-chan, ‘cause if that’s the truth, then what was the whole shebang with you, like...trying to punch my lights out?”

*This guy is such a motherfucker*, Kaito thinks. “Well—” he starts, “fine, so I *clearly* wanted to get the Exisal remote off of you too, but—”

“And you thought a little guerilla warfare would—”

“But I only tried it ‘cause—”

“—help your chances with—”

“—Because I know you’re not the fucking mastermind!” Kaito exclaims.

For what it’s worth, it does shut Ouma up. Kaito swallows hard at raising his voice like that—right now, it’s a mile from the surface, but deep in his lungs, he feels that familiar spark of pain igniting.

Ouma simply watches him for the next couple of seconds, and the uncharacteristic stillness sends uneasy pins and needles down the top of Kaito’s spine. Eventually, he opens his mouth.

“Lemme guess. Saihara-chan suggested this one, and you’re just parroting it.”

“Wh—Yeah, Shuichi *said* it to me, but I’m not parroting shit!” Kaito splutters. “He stopped by the...” Why’s he hesitating? There’s no use in being secretive now. “By the bathroom window earlier, with Harumaki, and said a flashback light showed up in the dining hall, and... Look, he didn’t get into all the details, but it was enough for me to understand that whatever it was, it fucking *demolished* everything you’ve been trying to...set up, or whatever.” Kaito glares into the face of Ouma’s impassiveness, his hands clenching into fists. “And it doesn’t take a genius to realize that you’ve been *way* too fucking careful this whole time to make a mistake like that!”

Something finally stabs at the corner of Ouma’s poker face, and he promptly turns away. A hop, skip, and a jump later, he’s fiddling with something near the control panel, and Kaito is just pulling himself to his feet bemusedly when something like a flash-bang detonates and sends him reeling.

By the time Kaito regains his bearings, Ouma is planted opposite of him again, half-obscured by splotchy, glittering patches of light.

“Oi... Dude, what the fuck did you—?”

“I don’t wanna fight anymore,” Ouma says, “so let’s just cut to the chase. I need you to kill me, Momota-chan.”

*That* steals the air out of Kaito’s lungs. He’s turning the meaning of the sentence over and over in his mind—still half-dazed, still seeing stars—when he spits out, almost involuntarily, “*What?*” It’s not even a question to Ouma, whose smile stretches uncannily wide. Evidently—and he soon confirms as

much—he’d been devising this in advance.

*A plan to end the killing game*, he calls it, launching into the whole song and dance. Weeks of scheming, faux displays—even the root of their aborted squabble was fake, Ouma tells him, waving the Exisal remote—*Iruma’s* Exisal remote—in his face. His prior dealings, far-off voyeurs, the limits of the killing game—Ouma covers all these bases and more in minutes, and Kaito’s left dizzy from keeping track of them, hardly getting a question in edgewise. A murder that not even Monokuma can solve, Ouma says, is the only way to destroy the foundation of the game itself. The mastermind is bound by the rules. If the rules are a sham, the game must end.

Someone has to die. It has to be him.

“No fucking way!” Kaito bursts. “Do you *hear* yourself?! You’re talking about your life!”

Ouma huffs at him, of all things. “Is *that* the part you’re hung up on, Momota-chan?” He’s got the audacity to check his nailbeds. “As the Ultimate Supreme Leader, *I’m* willing to do whatever it takes to end this killing game... Aren’t you?”

“I...” Kaito struggles to order his thoughts, to land on a feeling for *whatever’s* transpiring. Nearly three days he was held hostage, and for what? A suicide plot at the tailend of Gonta’s and Iruma’s callous murders? But according to Ouma, those had been part of some cruel, immersive plot anyway, to convince everyone that—how could Kaito be sure all of this was even true?! These were the words of a self-admitted, deep-rooted *liar*.

And yet, so much of it *does* add up, Kaito knows: the recordings, Monokuma’s words, the rules themselves, and... God, it’s strange to admit it, but underneath it all, a twinge of respect is cultivating in his heart. He can’t shake the thought that the idea itself is actually insanely badass.

“Look, I’ll... I’ll admit it, dude, you’ve... clearly thought this through, and—of course I want to end this dumbass killing game, but—and yeah, maybe if we do what you say, we *will* have a chance, but—”

“Buuut?”

“But I still can’t up and fucking *kill you* to do it!” Kaito shouts. “What’s your deal?!”

“...What’s my—?”

Too many warring emotions clash through Kaito’s chest cavity, ricocheting off whatever disease is feeding there. “You’re not *sick*, it’s not like you’re in any danger right this second, and—what I mean is, there’s no reason for you to kill yourself to get out of here, but that’s what you’re planning anyway?! Come on!” The longer he rambles on, the more that devil-may-care expression on Ouma’s face slowly deteriorates into a scowl. “Listen to me. *Ouma*. There’s no doubt this is a genius plan, but you have *everything* to lose!”

Ouma’s shoulders tense up. “...I’m not understanding this change of heart, Momota-chan,” he says. “Not even a week ago, you would’ve been more than happy to watch me die.”

“That’s not true!” Kaito protests. “I was just mad! Who wouldn’t be fucking mad after that?!”

The memory of Gonta’s nebulous, cratered body flickers in the corner of Kaito’s vision, and for a second, he wants to dart in and land the fucking punch he’d intended to on Ouma when that had happened, but—this *really* isn’t the time, so *of course* Ouma fucking brought it up—but still, despite all the shit he’d put them through, and despite how convinced Kaito is growing that this really might be the way to end it all, he *still* doesn’t want the kid to *die*.

“...*Look*,” Kaito continues. “You’re smart, Ouma. You’ve clearly figured out more than even Shuichi has. So—just



figure something else out *now*! Something that’s not gonna end your own life when you don’t—”

“Boy, I knew you’d say something really *stupid*, Momota-chan,” Ouma spits out, “but this is even worse than I imagined.” His grip visibly tightens around the Exisal remote, and despite how nonchalantly he lifts his arm, there’s still a slight tremor in it. “You can call off the little pacifist act now.”

A second later, the overhead cables squeal oppressively, and the wall of amber steel separating them from the courtyard begins winding up.

“What are…” Kaito mutters, watching the shutter rise helplessly. Just beyond it, layers of chunky, uneven *crashing* swell, and—the realization pierces through him. “What the fuck are you doing?!”

Three Exisals march around the corner, each thunderous stomp quaking the earth before they slowly tower to a stop behind Ouma. As the shutter falls again, at the base of their looming structures, dwarfed by the mechanical shadows and flanked by their whirring guns, Ouma grins familiarly.

“Since you *rudely* refused my offer, Momota-chan, I figured I’d make it clear that an offer it-was-not!” he sing-songs, free hand on his hip. “You’re just going to carry out the plan and kill me, or I’ll kill *you* instead. Prett-yyy fun, right?”

Kaito takes a jagged breath.

“What’s this?” Ouma asks. “Now the Luminary of the Stars is lost for words? Well, the options can’t get much simpler: you, or me. And you better hurry up and make a *decisionnnn*, before my finger slips and I accidentally—!”

“Fine, then let it be me!” Kaito yells. He’s too forceful, too sudden—the outburst draws a hard cough out of him, and then another, another, and another. Blood wells in the back of his throat, and with unsteady legs, Kaito drops to one knee.

Ouma’s voice trails off.

“If one of us has to die to end this, then—then it should be the one who’s dying anyway,” Kaito manages. “I swore… to protect everyone when we first got here—even you, even…after all this stupid shit you’ve done—and,” his voice fractures, “if this is how I have to do it, then so be it!”

With interlocked fingers, Kaito screws his eyes shut and sets his hands behind his neck. His temples pulse against his forearms—the position and his raucous heartbeat drown out the surrounding noise, but even so, he can sense that Ouma still hasn’t moved.

“Get on with it, then!” Kaito yells after another moment passes. “Send me out with a bang worthy of killing the Luminary of the Stars!”

Kaito’s thoughts are racing deliriously before his internal monologue fails him and morphs, instead, into his elbows bandaged with cartoon spaceships; his grandparents’ soft smiles and his unbrushed hair; Shuichi and Harumaki, gazing at marionette stars; and he’s so disoriented in the lucidity of these memories that he recognizes, but doesn’t comprehend the approaching footfalls until they’re upon him, a hand is squishing his jaw, and Ouma’s determined expression is fissuring his daydreams.



“Uh,” Kaito says.

Ouma’s round face scrunches up as he leans in closer, tracking Kaito’s eyes. Kaito merely blinks back, motionless in his bewilderment.

“You’re…actually serious, aren’t you?” Ouma says. His hand tightens on Kaito’s jaw, and he angles his head left, right, then center before slackening up. “…You *are*. You actually meant every simple, starry-eyed word of that…”

It’s not a question—and he gleans the partial insult underneath—yet Kaito nods his assent instinctually.

Ouma sighs and lowers his gaze.

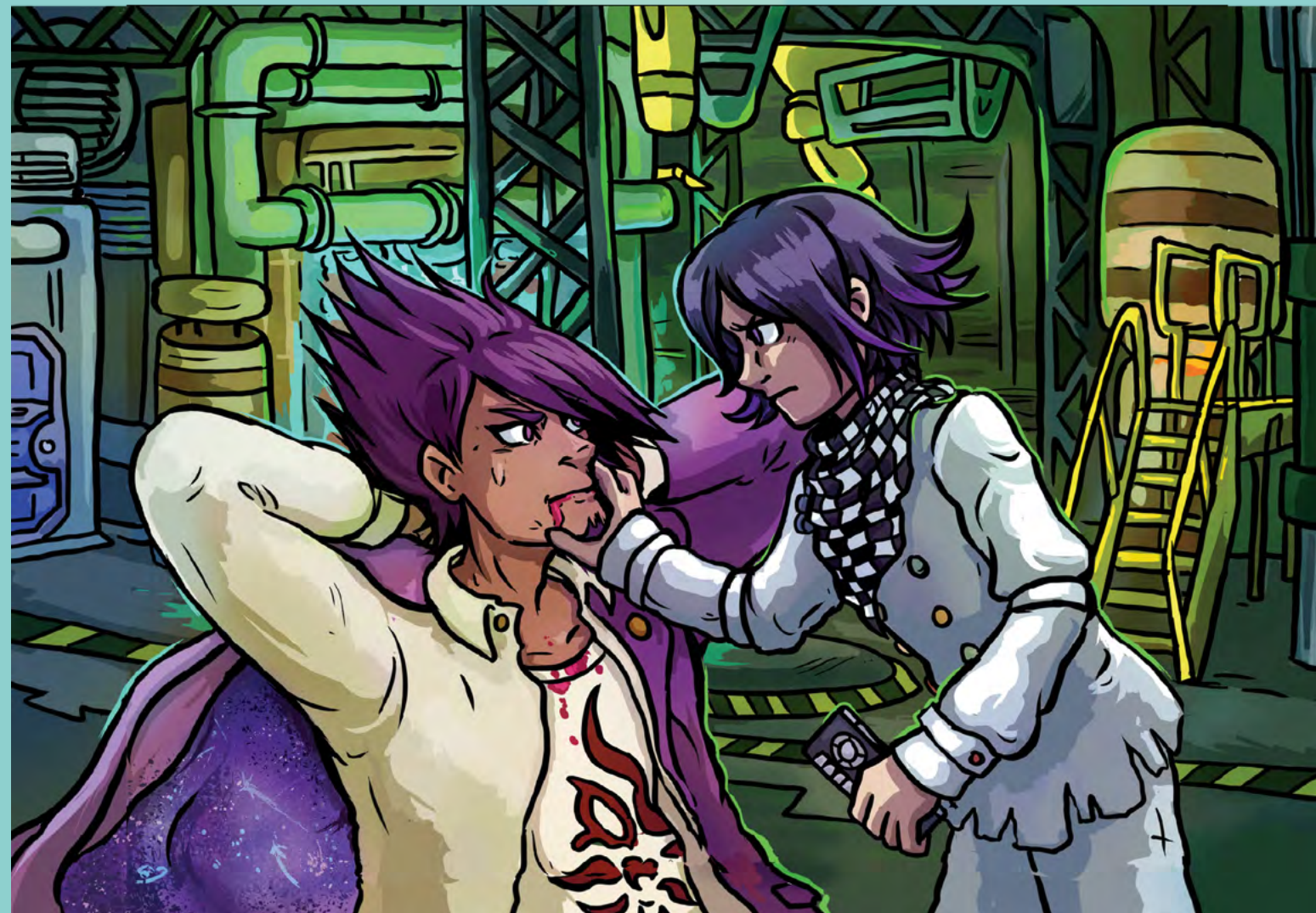
“…I was wrong about you then, Momota-chan,” he murmurs. “You really are…not boring.”

Before Kaito can respond, Ouma relinquishes the hold on his face. He wiggles his wrist down, curls his fingers over the loose, white fabric of his sleeve, and dabs at Kaito’s chin. The material comes away with a dot of blood.

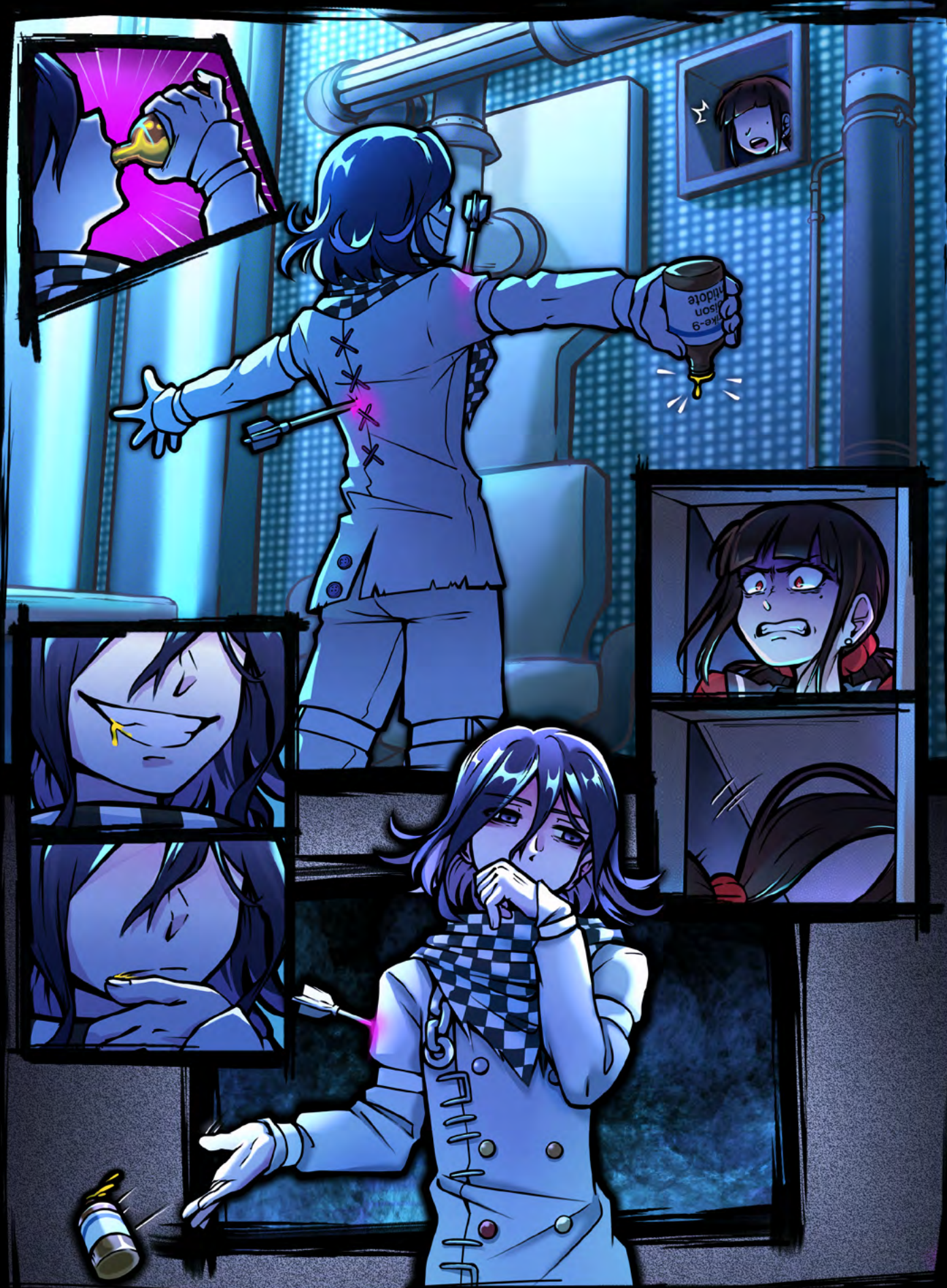
With another weary sigh, Ouma fixes Kaito with an inscrutable expression.

“…Since you’re so adamant about refusing, Momota-chan, what’s *your* grand plan to bring the house down?” he asks. “And you’d better share it quickly, too, because I’m sure…” Ouma’s voice thickens.

“…Wherever they are now, if it hasn’t happened already…the mastermind must be instigating another murder.”



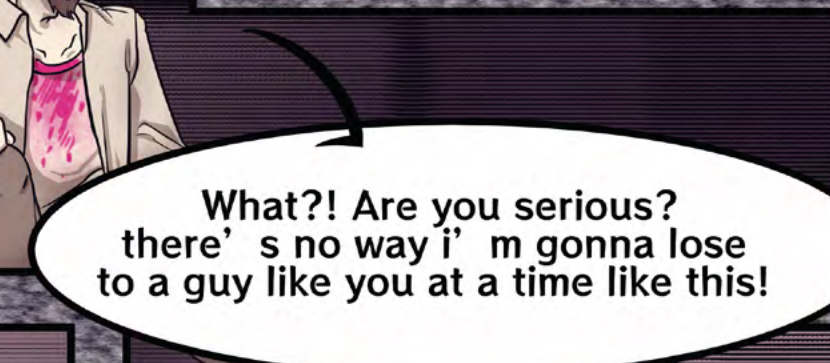
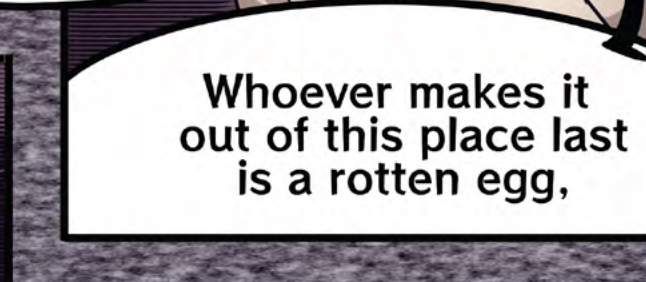
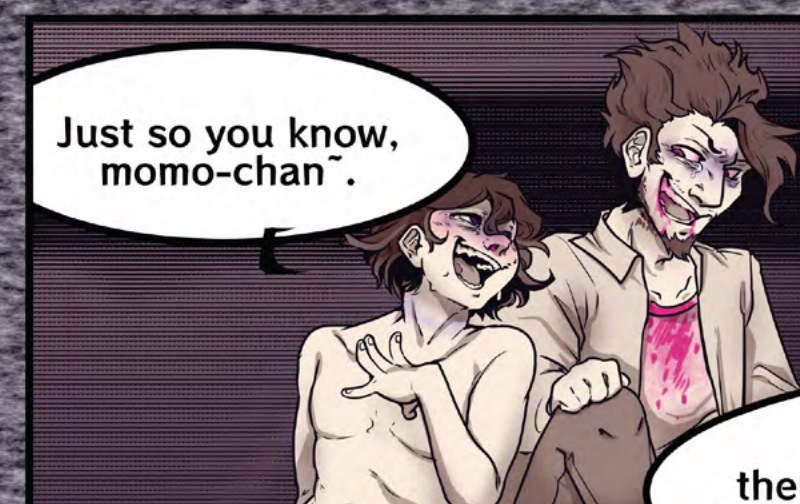
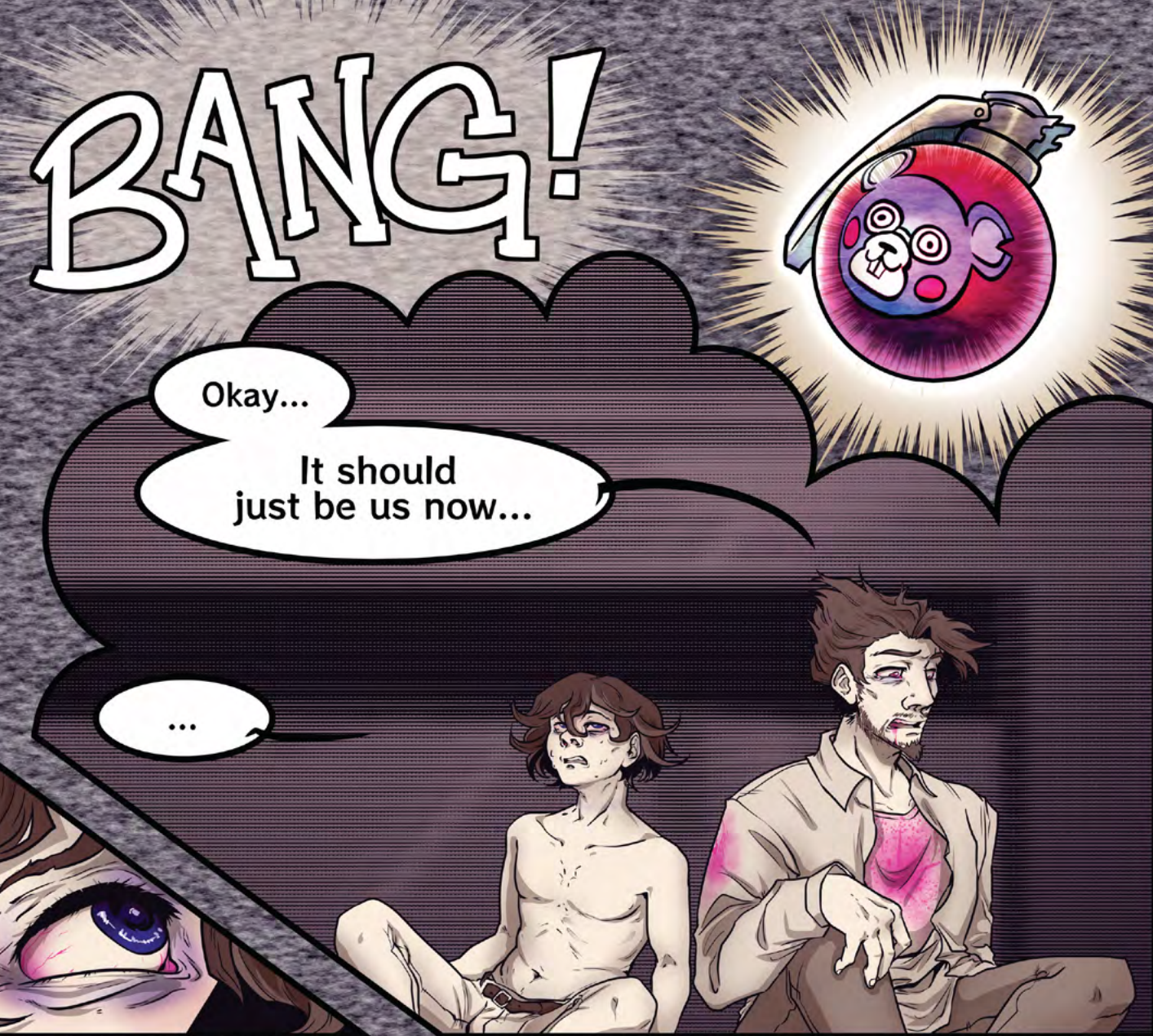
















## PLOT AND *Twist*

Kokichi wakes up inside an Exisal.

His vision is blurry, everything surrounding him akin to shadowy blobs. Each time he blinks, the blobs warp into something new. Wires. Monitors. A screen showing a view of the hangar, specifically the shutter, which rises between blinks.



The shutter shudders open and Kokichi trembles along with it, its rumbles reverberating in his chest. A moment later, Kiibo and Tsumugi appear on the screen.

Tsumugi is wringing her hands together, her expression nervous. “Kiibo? Why have you come back here?”

“My inner voice is telling me I should take one last look around,” Kiibo answers. “I believe there’s a possibility we overlooked something.”

“But that’s not possible,” Tsumugi tells him. “If we had, we wouldn’t have made it through the class trial.”

...Class trial?

“I know that,” Kiibo responds. “But my inner voice... it’s insisting I stay.”

“It’s just, being here makes me feel sick,” Tsumugi admits weakly. “The press hasn’t even been cleaned yet. He’s... He’s still *in* there.”

“You should leave if you’re feeling unwell,” Kiibo responds distractedly, his attention held hostage by the hydraulic press. “Although before you do, I want to ask something first. Humans have a lot of blood, correct?”

“Um... yes? I suppose they do. Why?”

Kiibo pauses before saying, “Ouma might’ve been on the smaller side but the amount of blood coming from the press... I just thought there’d be... *more*.”

“I’m not sure what you’re implying,” Tsumugi responds, frowning. “Y’know, your antenna *did* almost fall off after that rock hit it. Maybe there’s something wrong with your judgement?”

“Antenna?” Kiibo sounds perplexed. “Are you on about... my hair?”

“Yes!” Tsumugi answers abruptly. “Sorry, I think the class trial drained me more than I thought. Please ignore me!”

Kokichi forces himself to sit up properly. As he does, a silky fabric falls unexpectedly into his lap. His body protests as he moves, his back and arm begging the loudest for mercy. Small dots fill his vision. If he pretends hard enough, they almost look like stars.

He navigates through them, reaching forward and pressing buttons haphazardly, hoping one of them will open the Exisal. The sooner he escapes, the sooner he can figure out what’s going on. After a few aimless attempts, he presses



something that causes the Exisal’s arm to jerk.

“What was that?” Kiibo immediately asks.

“Did... that Exisal just move?” Tsumugi frets.

“Maybe there’s something inside it? We should check before the Monokubs reclaim them–”

Before Kiibo can move, Kokichi finally hits the right button. The Exisal springs open, and a whooshing noise clogs his ears. Kokichi slams his hands over them, disorientated.

Tsumugi pales. “O-Ouma?”

Kokichi stands but swiftly loses his balance, his knees weak. He tumbles from the Exisal, landing in a heap. The same silky fabric from earlier blankets him.

“You’re not supposed to be here,” Kiibo murmurs in disbelief. He rushes over to help, his heavy footsteps echoing around the hangar.

“E-Excuse me?” Kokichi fights feebly against the fabric, which Kiibo ends up plucking off him.

Wait.

Kokichi rubs his eyes, zeroing in on the fabric draped over Kiibo’s arm.

That’s Kaito’s jacket.

“If you’re here...” Tsumugi turns to the hydraulic press, horrified. Kokichi copies her, his chest tightening as the smell of blood hits him just as he spots it seeping from the press. “This... This isn’t right. You’re not supposed to be alive,” Tsumugi says, almost accusingly. “Momota said he had crushed you.”

Kokichi freezes as memories of last night abruptly resurface in fuzzy fragments.

*Maki’s murderous glare whilst she aimed a crossbow at him. A poisoned arrow lodging into his back. The whistle of a second arrow piercing the air.*

*It did not hit its intended target.*

After that, his memories blur, time slipping through his fingers.

He tries to latch onto something tangible, and when he does, he’s lying on top of Kaito’s jacket, cradled by stars, staring up at cold metal.

*Oh yeah. He ended up under the press at some point.*

*Breathing had become a battle as his vision blurred around the edges. He remembers waiting for Kaito to finish his job, to lower the press and continue with Kokichi’s plan.*



*Kokichi had waited and waited and waited.*

*Then, something odd happened. Something uncalculated.*

*Kaito walked away from the controls. Kaito deviated from his role and headed over to the press instead of lowering it.*

“What... What do you think you’re doing?” Kokichi hissed once he realised Kaito was crouched next to him.

“I can’t do this.”

*Kaito’s confession caused Kokichi to snap his head in his direction. “What do you mean... you can’t do this? You have to–”*

*Kokichi’s stomach lurched when he finally saw the look on Kaito’s face, a look he thought he’d never see Kaito wear.*

*Desperation.*

“You know how fucked up all this is, right?” Kaito’s eyes continuously searched the hangar as if hunting for a hidden second option. An option that didn’t include turning the hydraulic press into a murder weapon. “Just seeing you lying under there...”

“Don’t you dare pity me,” Kokichi hissed. “Remember... if I die before you crush me... Harukawa will become the blackened.”

“...Then keep fighting.”

“Hah?”

“When did you start taking the easy way out?” Something apologetic appeared in Kaito’s eyes. “I... I get it. Ending the killing game is what I want too but... you’ve still got time. You might not think you do but you do. You... You have to.”

“Momota?”

“Ending the killing game with more killing... that can’t be our only option, right?”

“Y-You’re abandoning my plan?”

*Kaito shook his head. “Just... adding one last twist.” Kaito then smiled. It did not reach his eyes. “One that definitely isn’t boring, I promise. All you gotta do is hold on a little longer.”*

What happened after Kaito said that, Kokichi can’t remember.

“Where’s Momota?” Kokichi asks as he struggles to pick himself up.

Kiibo pulls a face, conflicted. “You shouldn’t be moving around so much. You likely still have poison in your system–”





“I... *need*... to find Momota,” Kokichi stresses through gritted teeth. “He’s... in so much trouble... Thinking he can just... change my plan at the last second like that... Who does he think he is?”

Behind him, Tsumugi and Kiibo share a look of unease.

“Ouma,” Tsumugi murmurs apprehensively. “Momota... He’s–”

Tsumugi’s voice becomes background noise as Kokichi stumbles his way out of the hangar.

It’s dark outside. At first, nothing seems out of place. Just himself. Then, he spots the fine wisps of smoke floating up into the air, curled like beckoning hands.

“Ouma,” Tsumugi tries again, “I really don’t think–”

Kokichi comes to a halt outside the academy, staring blankly at the scene in front of him. A broken rocket catches his attention first. His gaze then drifts to the figure laid in front of it. Kokichi straightens his back and waits for Kaito to say something.

He doesn’t.

How rude of him.

“O-Oi, Momota,” Kokichi calls out, hobbling over to him. Distantly, he can feel Shuichi, Maki and Himiko gawking at him, alarmed. “What do you... think you’re playing at, huh? Messing with my plan... you ungrateful *bastard*.”

Maki bristles, causing Shuichi to place his hand against her arm. The detective turns to Kiibo and Tsumugi for answers, frowning once he clocks their lost expressions.

“Momota,” Kokichi presses. The world suddenly twists and he ends up back on the floor. Kokichi grimaces but persists, refusing to let the poison get the better of him. He drags himself over to Kaito, scratching his skin against the stony ground.

As he gets closer, he notices Kaito is wearing the spare jacket he had left in the red Exisal for him. A hero needs to look their best, after all. Kokichi reaches out to shake him before stopping at the last second.

Why is Kaito’s chin so bloody?

...Oh.

Kokichi swallows and lets his hand drop uselessly onto the floor.

“What’s going on here?!”

Monokuma appears seemingly out of thin air, sounding as vexed as he looks.

Kokichi decides someone else can answer him. Right now, he’s at a loss, a single question plaguing his thoughts.

What did Kaito *do*?

“Eh?” Monokuma covers his mouth with his paw, tilting his head to the side the moment he spots Kokichi by Kaito’s body. “Is that Ouma? Sheesh, he sucks at being dead.”

“W-We found him in the hangar,” Tsumugi reveals anxiously. “He was hidden in one of the Exisals.”

“But... you said he was *dead*,” Shuichi stammers, grief choking his voice. “You punished Momota because you said he killed Ouma.”

Next to him, Maki’s hand twitches as if searching for a knife.

“Nyeh... This doesn’t make any sense,” Himiko murmurs. “If Ouma’s still alive... Momota shouldn’t have been...”

“...Does this mean... Monokuma broke a rule?” Tsumugi asks no one in particular, a distant look in her eyes.



Kokichi stares at Kaito silently. If he opens his mouth, he’s not sure what will come out.

He’s not supposed to be here. He’s supposed to be dead.

Yet he’s not, because Kaito decided a monster was worth sparing.

Kokichi shivers and curls in on himself, beads of cold sweat rolling down from his hairline. He might still be alive but he’s not sure for how much longer.

“Are you okay, Ouma?” Kiibo kneels down next to him, draping Kaito’s jacket over his shoulders. Kaito’s original jacket, the one he’d worn the entire game. The jacket that was *supposed* to end up crushed with Kokichi. “You don’t look too good.”

“Monokuma? What happens now?” Tsumugi asks cautiously, clutching her hands to her chest. “It’s plain to see that Momota was innocent.”

That’s right. How did Kokichi overlook such an important thing? Monokuma needs to be reminded that his actions have consequences. And

unfortunately for Monokuma, he has no way of weaselling his way out of this one. Kokichi snorts to himself as he pictures Monokuma panicking, earning himself a few shocked stares.

“You... punished an innocent person,” Kokichi prompts Monokuma. “You broke one of your *precious rules*. You know, the rules you... adore so much?”

Kokichi catches his manic smile in the reflection of Monokuma’s red eye. He dares Monokuma to prove him wrong, dares him to cheat his way out of this one.

Dares him to say Kaito’s death was meaningless.

“Ouma, do you know how Momota died?”

Kokichi chokes on a laugh, gesturing at the rocket. “Are you *blind*? Obviously you killed him–”

“Perhaps you should take another real good look at your partner in crime,” Monokuma hums, admiring the rocket before sighing dejectedly, kicking his foot against the floor. “Usually my punishments play out perfectly but this time there was an... unexpected error mid punishment.”

Kokichi scoffs dismissively. “*And*? So what?”



Shuichi presses a hand against his mouth, his eyes wide. “Momota caused the error, didn’t he?” His gaze drops down to Kaito’s chin. “By... dying mid punishment.”

“Ding, ding, ding! That’s right!” Monokuma cheers. “Everyone’s favourite astronaut rudely died before my punishment could finish him off! Which means...” Monokuma’s smile stretches wide. “Because Momota died due to his illness, there’s been no foul play, right?”

Kokichi’s grin vanishes, the implication behind Monokuma’s words feeling like a punch to the gut.

No. No. This wasn’t how it was supposed to go.

Yet the truth is laid out in front of him. A truth that can’t be manipulated into a lie. A truth Kokichi has no choice but to acknowledge.

The killing game has every reason to continue.

Neither his or Kaito’s plan worked.

They both failed.









[Scene opens on a dark, blue-lit backdrop. From off-camera, someone whistles.]

???

Well, isn't this a throwback! Bit of a waste, though, don'tcha think? Not much of a callback if my adoring fans don't recognize the set piece when this inevitably gets out, y'know?

[A figure enters frame. The focus stabilizes as he slumps sideways in the throne-like chair center-shot, kicking his legs up with abandon. He peers somewhere beyond the camera expectantly.]

???

Alright then—what's my line?

[Silence.]

???

What, you expect *me* to do all the work for you? Ugh. *Fine*.

[He looks directly into the camera. Then, offers it a small wave.]

???

Ahem. Hey there, me! I know—what a shocker! Or, maybe not. I wouldn't put it past you if something about this rings a bell.

...And to be honest, that's the problem, isn't it? See, if I go and play this message straight, that'd just be rehashing ol' *You-know-who*-chan's schtick, and that'd be sooo *cliché*!

So—sorry, self—that means you're taking the back seat.

[His eyes narrow. He leans in towards the camera conspiratorially.]

???

Instead, I want to focus on *you*. Yes, *you*—the hypothetical *not-me* who's almost certainly watching this.

...Oh *please*, stop gaping. You'll let flies in—*bleh*!

Now, see, this is the far more interesting scenario. Knowing me, I hold my cards very close to my chest, and a video like this? Heaven forbid I would let just *anyone* see it.

So if you—hypothetical not-me—are indeed watching this, then... Well, regretfully, that can only mean one thing.

I *must* be dead.



Momota Kaito does not feel like a survivor. He feels even less so like the *Ultimate* Survivor, even if his Monopad insists this is the case.

As with every morning, he silences his alarm and unlocks the screen to his report card. Later, staring at his reflection in the bathroom mirror, he runs through the profile from memory.

MOMOTA KAITO  
HEIGHT: 6'. WEIGHT: 163 lbs. DOB: April 12th.  
LIKES: Cafeteria Pudding Cups. HATES: Physical rehab.  
NOTES: Ultimate Survivor.

He runs through it over and over, so certain he's missing something. After all—

“What good is surviving an incurable disease just to end up in some stupid bear's fucked-up killing game, y'know?”

The Ultimate Theologian seated beside him smiles serenely. “*Surely* the law of Karmic Balance is at play and your pendulum of Fate will swing towards an ever-more prosperous outcome.”

The Ultimate Architect holds her fingers up to frame Momota's face, peering through them. “Exactly! If anything, perhaps your title predisposes you *against* dying!”

“Or maybe,” the Ultimate across from him supplies, “your luck just plain sucks.”

Momota glances up from his meal with a frown. “Who are you again?”

“Are you serious?” the boy asks, spooning a large dollop of pudding into his mouth. “You were nipping at my ankles, yapping like a rabid chihuahua all through yesterday's free time and you don't remember? Way to make a guy feel memorable.”

Stubbornly, Momota counters, “That's not an answer.”

“Un-*bee*-lievable.” Chocolate smears messily across the boy's toothy grin. “Alright, once more for buzz-brain: Ouma Kokichi, *Ultimate* *Apiarist*. Are you going to finish that?”

Momota follows his extended finger to the lunch tray in front of him. The half-eaten remains of his own pudding jiggle wetly as the others excuse themselves.

Ouma's violet eyes peer at him, insistent.

“Go for it,” he eventually sighs, sliding the plastic carton across the table. “I can't stand the artificial flavoring in those things. Makes me gag.”

Ouma accepts his offering with a raised eyebrow and a thoughtful, “*Huh*.”

For some reason, the sound nags at the back of Momota's mind, long after breakfast ends.





???

Oh *please*, dear viewer, don't shed any tears for me! This is for the best, really. Like I said, this spices things up a bit! Adds some pizazz, and who doesn't love that?

Back on topic. If you're *aren't* me, then by watching my Super Special Survivor's Perk—hand-crafted for my own *personal* gain—that means all the little secrets I would normally be entrusting to myself become *yours* instead to do whatever with.

And, like, have you met me? Nabbing the perk of a naturally-gifted genius like myself... why, that would be a straight-shot ticket to winning this game!

...Jeez, no wonder I've been offed.



The first body shows up dead three days later.

“So much for Karmic Balance,” Ouma chirps, tipping his head up to peer at the noose suspending the poor Ultimate Theologian from the support beam overhead. The floodlights above cause his shadow to swing ominously as the body passes by in slow, gruesome figure-eights.

“A *pendulum*,” the Ultimate Architect stammers, looking aghast. “He mentioned that to us over breakfast the other day, right? That can't be a coincidence.”

“I dunno,” Momota mumbles. “Hate to say it, but that's kind of a stretch. *Shit!*” His attempt to grab the victim's ankle hits air.

“How are you both so okay with this?” the girl yelps. “Is this a joke to you? Someone's *dead*.”

*She's right*, Momota thinks. Discovering the body *should* have unsettled him more, in this state especially. As unbelievable as the situation is, it *isn't* a joke.

“But it *is* kind of funny.” Ouma tucks his hands behind his head. “In a macabre sort of way. And I can say that with authority, as the *Ultimate Comedian*. Hey, pop quiz, Momota-chan: how long would you say that cable is? Tick-tock, time's a-wasting!”

“*Christ*, give me a sec.” Momota opens up the recently-deceased's profile. “Says here he was 5'6”, so if you eyeball off that, I'd say... forty feet?” Belatedly, something clicks. “Wait, what'd you call me?”

Footsteps echo out behind them, along with the sharp gasps and cries of the others. The school-bell chime of Monokuma's Body Discovery announcement booms off the domed ceiling as their peers gaze up in horror.

Momota barely hears any of it. Instead, he stares at the waxing shape of Ouma's grin, ears ringing for a completely different reason.



???

So congrats, either for killing me or reaping the benefits of someone else's work! Now comes the fun part. After all, by watching this and stealing my secrets, I'd say you've become nothing short of my unwitting accomplice!

...*accomplice*. What a weird way for me to phrase that. In fact, a lot of what I've said so far has been *pretty* weird, huh? Weird enough to make a clever enough person rethink *all* the other things I've said.

Oh, not you, though. I'm sure everything of note has gone right over your pretty little head. I bet you'll finish this video and go about this Killing Game, blissfully ignorant as you kill or get killed instead.



It doesn't take long for the trial to erupt into chaos.

“—e were in the library together from dinner until the Body Discov—”

“—n't be me, since there's no way to get outside from the bathhouse without—”

“—old you, my room lock was broken, and I wasn't let out until *after*—”

“—is the only one without an alibi for the time of the murder, isn't he?”

The room goes silent.

“Dang,” Ouma says, folded lazily over his podium. “I suppose I am.”

“*Wait...*” The Architect gasps from Momota's left. “When the three of us discovered the victim, did the body announcement play?”

“Now that I think about it,” Ouma chimes in, “it was pretty quiet, especially to my well-trained *Ultimate Maestro's* ears.”

“That's it!” She turns to the others with newfound fervor. “That must mean that the killer was one of the three of us at the scene! And since Momota-kun and I were together when the killing took place, the only one left that makes sense is...”

Ouma nods thoughtfully as the anxious chatter crescendos. “Well, when you put it that way, it does seem pretty clean-cut. I suppose I—”

“No *fucking* way.”

Every wide-eyed gaze in the room turns. From the podium across from his, Ouma's is the widest of all. “Come again?”

“I said,” Momota replies, half laughing at the strangeness of it all, “there's no *way* it's you.”

Ouma's expression creases. His head tilts. “*Huh*,” he says. “And what exactly makes you say that?”

It's odd, isn't it? The evidence lines up. The alibis check out. Momota's been chastised for his bleeding heart and





stubbornness more times than he can count. Why should this be any different?

“Because I *know* you,” he replies—*absurdly*—with a lopsided grin. “And if I know anything, it’s what a lying sack of shit you are.”

Somehow, it comes out sounding *fond*. Somehow, it’s the easiest thing he’s said all week.



???

But maybe—*just* maybe—you *are* feeling it. A twinge at the back of your brain. An itch you can’t scratch. The ugly, nagging sense that you should be remembering something *more*.

Well, what then, oh accomplice mine? What will you *do* with this information you’ve inherited?



Momota does the math three separate times. Each time, the same result.

“See? The trick is in the pendulum length. If you increased that over time, the swings’d gradually grow longer, but the momentum would be conserved.” He jabs his messy pen scrawl towards the rest of the room, breathless in a way he hasn’t felt since his hospital days. “We assumed the timeline based on the oscillation of the cable at a *single*, fixed length, but if someone was able to lower the body from out of sight using the pulleys, that’d throw our math completely off!”

There are angry tears running down the Architect’s cheeks. “You’re wrong!” she wails. “Besides, what could a bedridden invalid like you *possibly* know about complex physics, anyway?”

*It’s just basic orbital mechanics*, he nearly fires back, but chokes violently around the words.

*You shouldn’t know that*, each biting cough reprimands, tightening their grip on his throat.

No, he agrees, he shouldn’t. Yet he does all the same.

Another cough. His palm feels wet. When he pulls it away, he expects to see blood, but finds only spittle.

“Momota-chan,” chimes a familiar voice. He glances up from his barren palm. Ouma’s gaze meets his unwaveringly. “Now that you mention it, didn’t the cable have something icky on it when we got it untied? That was *awfully* suspicious.”

The thing is, Momota is certain the cable had been bone dry. Still, the air hangs heavily between them. *Insistently*.

He swallows.

“Yeah.” The lie comes easily, even as his lungs try their best to stop him. “The same grease we found in the pulley.”

The room erupts in discourse. Ouma’s grin unfurls slowly, like a belladonna blossom.

The spurious taste of blood lingers where the lie had easily slipped off Momota’s tongue. It tastes dangerous and familiar in a way Momota can’t put a finger to.

Deep down, though, something in him yearns for more.



???

Don’t look at me—I can’t tell you what to do. I’m *dead*. Most likely, at least.

And, frankly, this recording could all just be a lie. One final act of deceit from beyond the grave to mess with you. It’s *Ultimately* what I’m best at, after all. But then, I don’t have to tell you that, of all people.

Which means the decision is in your hands. Consider it your consolation prize—my dear, unwitting accomplice—for being stupid enough to not have left well and good alone.

Just remember: you asked for this. So try not to waste our chance, okay, M—

*[An alarm blares as the scene is lit in angry red lighting, drowning out the end of his sentence.]*



The murderer is identified. The execution proceeds. The trial ends.

On the elevator ride after, Momota thinks he feels a familiar phantom touch at his hip, but by the time he jerks to look, he finds nothing and no one amongst these strangers.

So he trudges to his room alone, pulls the Monopad from his side-pocket, and tosses it to the nightstand, uncaring. He falls into bed, angry and exhausted and utterly spent.

Sleep comes easily, as do the dreams.

He dreams of wisteria flowers and constellations. Electric hammers and spilt poison. A pinstripe hat, laid limp beside an equally limp body.

He dreams of a trial. Of a familiar figure, willingly letting himself sink into the inky unknown of its denouement, joyfully crying out for Despair to his audience as his throat filled up with ichor.

He dreams of himself, diving in after, because what more did he have to lose? Because he had to see the others safe. Because the echoes that had bubbled up in the boy’s wake had whispered *lies, lies, he **always** lies, so this must also—*

The alarm comes too quickly.

As Momota paws at the screen of the Monopad like any other day, something feels *off*. The apps are mapped differently. The UI seems a cooler shade of violet. Instead of navigating to his profile as usual, a notification winking at him from the corner of the screen draws his attention.

He opens it.

*[This Perk Is Not A Will]*, the message header reads.



*[The boy winks. His grin is all teeth.]*







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SUPPORTING CAST

WRITERS

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twitter: glownary  
tumblr: glownary  
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ao3: glownary

**Izfaish**

tumblr: izfaish  
ao3: faish  
ao3: grand\_mephy

**kaitolovebot**

tumblr: kaitolovebot  
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**Training-trio-irl**

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tumblr: sreyeh  
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**vitalgutzz**

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**Quinn \***

tumblr: quinn-art-box  
insta: quinn-artbox

**Mayday**

tumblr: satellite-mayday

**Dr Chalk**

twitter: doctor\_chalk  
insta: doctor\_chalk  
tumblr: dr-chalk

**Super Galaxy Paper**

tumblr: galacticcertainty  
twitter: galaxywinds2  
insta: galactic.certainty

**Spectralreplica**

tumblr: spectralreplica  
insta: spectralreplica.art  
carrd: spectralreplica

**Pluto \***

tumblr: g0nta-g0kuhara  
insta: g0nta.g0kuhara

**Lucitrius**

tumblr: lucitrius  
insta: lucitrius

**Noodle**

tumblr: doodles-by-noodles

**Elle**

insta: numbuh424  
tumblr: numbuh424  
twitter: numbuh424

**Shinina**

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**caeboa \***

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\* Dual role as Spot Artist



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 Phone Wallpaper  
 2-Sided Charm



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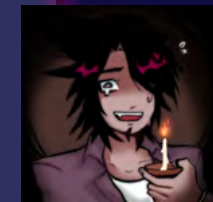
Sliding Enamel Pin  
 Print



### Zee

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 tumblr: c0wnfiish

Linked Charm  
 Matching Icons  
 Diecut Sticker



### Samisey

linktree: samisey  
 twitter: samisey  
 tumblr: samiisey  
 insta: samisey

Matching Buttons  
 2-piece Standee





## Valentine

insta: valentineseraph  
twitter: valentineseraph  
tumblr: valentineseraph

Banner Image  
Diecut Sticker  
2-Sided Charm



## Wraeth

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toyhouse: wraether  
vgen: wraether

7 Animated Emotes  
2 Tarot Card Prints  
Washi Tape  
Sticky Notes



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Sticker Sheet





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Zeph

Thank you so much for supporting our project! We created this zine out of a true love for the ship Oumota and V3 itself, and we could not have done it without the support of every contributor, buyer, and follower. We hope you enjoy every bit of love and passion that went into these pages as much as we do.

The Show Must Go On! Moderation Team



- FIN -



